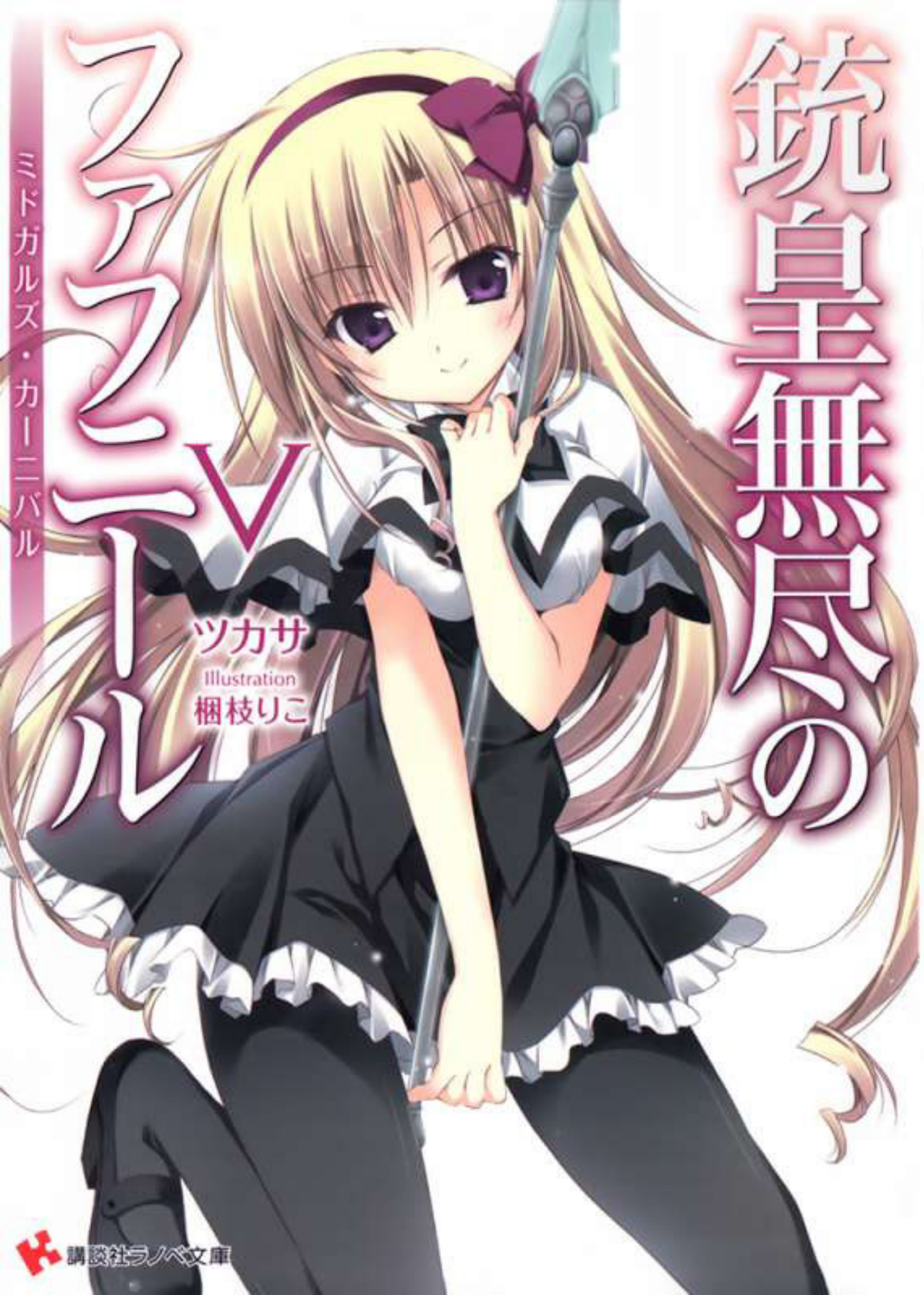
銃皇無尽のファフニール V

ミドガルズ・カーニバル

ツカサ
Illustration
梱枝りこ

講談社ラノベ文庫



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「……止めませんわ。止めたところで、あなたは行くのでしょう？」

「ああ――もちろんだ。よく分かったな」

「当然です。本日限定とはいえ、わたくしはあなたの恋人ですから」

きらめく刹那の祭りの中で、つなぎあった指先だけが、揺れる二つの心を結んで――。アンリミテッド学園バトルアクション第五弾！

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ISBN978-4-06-375379-0
C0193 ¥640E (0)

9784063753790

1920193006407

定価：本体640円(税別)

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コミカライズ
月刊「gooニ アフタヌーン」にて好評連載中！

原作：ツカサ
キャラクター原案：梱枝りこ
漫画：サブロウタ

銃皇無尽のファフニール
ミドガルズ・カーニバル
V
ツカサ
Illustration
梱枝りこ

「ひゃっ」

リーザが声を上げ、
びくりと体を震わせる。

「どうした？」

「だ、大丈夫ですわ。
反射的に声が出てしまっただけです」

『じゃあ続けるぞ』

俺はクリームを馴染ませるように、
リーザの背中を撫でた。

「わあ！
ユウ、すっごく素敵なの！」

ティア・ライトニング
Tear Lightning

「……感想は、それだけ？」

フィリル・クレスト
Firill Crest

「ん！」

レン・ミヤザワ
Ren Miyazawa

「――兄さん、
どういうことですか？」

物部深月
Mitsuki Monobe

「絶対に――許さないっ!!」

激情のままに叫び、イリスは赤い杖を振りかざす。
目が眩むような輝きが、
世界を黄昏色に染め変えた。
落下するユグドラシルの巨体を呑み込む、赤き光の柱。
時を剥奪する閃光が、
ユグドラシルを風化させていく。

銃皇無尽のファフニール

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Prologue

Hazy moonlight was filtering through the scattered clouds. A quiet night.

Two girls were walking under the moonlight as though they were enjoying the gentle night breeze.

One girl's long black hair fluttered while the other's platinum blonde hair reflected moonlight in the wind.

The black-haired girl was wearing a formal dress the same color as her hair, while the platinum blonde was in military uniform.

An unlikely combination of two girls giving off completely different impressions, they walked while looking at the rows of windowless buildings in the surroundings.

"Jeanne-chan, is this the right place?"

The black-haired girl asked in a calm voice.

"...Don't sound so familiar, Kili Surtr Muspelheim."

The platinum blonde named Jeanne responded with displeasure to the black-haired girl—Kili.

"What's the matter? This manner of address suits how cute you are, Jeanne-chan."

"Shut up."

Jeanne glared at Kili with her golden eyes, but Kili laughed in delight.

"Oh dear, how scary. We're companions currently cooperating for the same objective, so I hope you'll treat me nicer."

"You're the same as Hreidmar, someone who's a threat to Captain. I'm not going to be friends with you."

"My, how mistaken you are. What I do is all in his interest."

Kili deliberately sighed.

"Like hell anyone's going to believe a terrorist."

"What are you talking about? The moment you infiltrated this place with me, you've already become the same type of person."

Kili remarked sardonically and pointed to the surroundings.

Their current location was not a place of leisure suitable for an evening stroll.

The vast premises were encircled by tall walls and electrified barbed wire fencing. The entrances to the windowless rectangular buildings and the corners of passages were all equipped with security cameras with no blindspots.

This was NIFL's Base Number 3 in Western Europe, a military installation where unauthorized entry was forbidden.

"....."

Jeanne made a conflicted look and shifted her gaze away.

"Now that we're here already, you'd better prepare yourself. Also, you need to answer my earlier question. This base has clues to Hreidmar, is this intel correct?"

Stepping lightly, Kili made her way in front of Jeanne's gaze and asked with her head cocked.

"...At least his tracks can be traced, because the helicopter that transported Hreidmar to meet up with Sleipnir was marked with this base's identifying code."

Jeanne answered reluctantly.

"Yes, then no matter how short, he must have stopped here at some point. No mistake about that. Anyway, we will look for information in that direction."

Saying that, Kili walked openly along the center of the path while Jeanne followed, looking around her.

But at that moment, patrolling troops turned around the corner ahead.

"!?"

Jeanne reflexively prepared to fight but Kili shook her head calmly and confidently.

"Don't worry, just stay quiet and we won't be discovered."

Just as Kili claimed, the soldiers went past without noticing them.

"It's almost like magic..."

After the soldiers were gone from sight, Jeanne murmured with a sigh.

"I simply heated the air to adjust the refraction of light. Since the range is short, you'd better not get too far from me."

Kili made it sound effortless then approached a nearby building. Like the other buildings, it had no windows. The entrance was locked electronically and required a keycard and a code to open.

"Can't I open it by burning the circuits?"

Kili placed her palm on the electronic lock.

"Stop, that will only break the lock and make the door impossible to open. You leave me no choice—"

Jeanne took out a palm-sized device, installed it over the electronic lock, and started to operate deftly. In less than ten seconds, an unlocking sound was heard.

Hene, they infiltrated the building.

Although there were security cameras and sensors inside, the two of them easily got past those obstructions and came to what seemed like an office. There were rows of desks with computers on them.

"Let's start searching here."

Hearing Kili say that, Jeanne nodded silently.

Hence, the two of them switched on computers separately to find the information they needed.

Inside the dim room, only the tapping on keyboards could be heard.

"Oh..."

Before long, Kili exclaimed quietly.

"What is it? You found Hreidmar's entry and exit records?"

Jeanne stopped what she was doing and asked.

"No, not that, I simply saw a piece of amusing information."

"Amusing information?"

Hearing Kili say that, Jeanne frowned.

"This report says that Hekatonkheir, which was defeated at Midgard earlier, has reappeared in Japan. It is now crossing the Eurasian continent, moving westward."

"...I don't see what's so amusing about that kind of news. It's said that Hekatonkheir is immortal, so its reappearance is expected to a certain extent."

"Fufu, Jeanne-chan, you may not understand but this is extremely valuable information. Also, Hekatonkheir's apparent destination is also quite something to relish."

Kili brought her hand to her mouth and examined the screen closely.

"Where is Hekatonkheir headed?"

"Supposing it continues in a straight line, it will eventually pass through an area near the border between Germany and Denmark."

"I remember that's—"

Jeanne seemed to think of something with a gasp.

Seeing her reaction, Kili nodded and said with slight excitement:

"Indeed, there is currently another dragon there. Namely, the green dragon—'Green' Yggdrasil."

Chapter 1 - Unreturned Memories

Part 1

"Nii-san, wake up! Nii-san!"

Calling me loudly, someone was shaking my body, rousing my consciousness from deep sleep.

When I woke to a start, before my eyes was a familiar face.

A beautiful girl with gorgeous long black hair. Currently, she was pouting childishly. Rather than beautiful, cute would probably be a better description.

She—Mononobe Mitsuki—was my younger sister. Despite having no blood relations, we apparently lived together since childhood as family.

The reason why this sounded so vague was because it was purely knowledge. I lack the basis to support this knowledge... Memories.

I had now lost my memories from when Mitsuki and I were family in the past. To download data on the lost weapon for fighting Hraesvelgr, the price I paid was overwriting all memories prior to three years ago.

Hence, right in front of my face, glaring at me, she was nothing more than just a beautiful girl.

My heart raced. Unable to stare at her eyes directly from up close, I avoided eye contact.

"G-Good morning, Mitsuki."

I greeted her hoarsely.

"Do not give me 'good morning'! It is past 7am, you know? Hurry, get changed and come to the dining hall."

I found the alarm clock next to my pillow by touch and checked the time.

"Oh... I'm so sorry."

Normally, I got up at 6:30am but I seemed to have forgotten to set my alarm.

I frantically tried to get up but I felt a sharp pain when I applied force on my left hand.

"Ow..."

I frowned and drew out my left hand from under the covers, only to see a new swelling near the dragon mark on the back of my left hand.

"This is—"

I remember something similar happening before. Not long after defeating "White" Leviathan, a scar had appeared next to my dragon mark, then after that—I became able to create antigravitational matter.

"Nii-san, what is with that wound?"

However, Mitsuki peered at my left hand, purely worried about me.

"I probably scratched it on something while I was asleep. This isn't anything serious, so don't worry. It'll heal up soon on its own."

Perhaps I might be able to perform new transmutations. Although this was possible, since there was no proof, I simply glossed over it randomly for now. First, I should confer with Principal Charlotte B. Lord since she had suspected a causal link between scars on the dragon mark and obtaining powers.

"No! What if it gets infected? I will bring the first aid kit. Please wait, Nii-san."

Saying that, Mitsuki frantically rushed out of the room without waiting for my answer, apparently forgetting that she was still angry a moment ago.

Left alone in the room, I exhaled.

It was the third day after returning from the Principality of Erlia with the intense showdown against "Yellow" Hraesvelgr.

Finally free of battle fatigue and jet lag, my body had returned to normal.

But I was still unused to playing the role of Mitsuki's older brother properly.

I had not lost my memories at Midgard, so I knew how to get along with Mitsuki. But even so, my acting was still poor.

Mitsuki treated me as family and would interact with me at this kind of distance, but it troubled me and made me involuntarily nervous.

I had considered coming clean to her.

Seeing as I did not consider Mitsuki family on an emotional level, I should not be feeling excessive fear towards hurting her with the truth.

But in actual fact, I could not say it no matter what. Whenever I wanted to bring it up to her, I found myself unable to make a sound.

It was almost like *the real me* was holding me by the throat, telling me "don't hurt Mitsuki."

Hence, I was still playing the role of Mitsuki's older brother—while simultaneously tormented with the guilt of continued deceit.

Soon after, Mitsuki returned to the room and placed the first aid kit on the bed.

"Then I shall treat it for you, Nii-san. Please hold out your left hand."

"O-Okay."

As soon as I extended my left hand, Mitsuki grabbed it without hesitation. The feeling of her hand, a size smaller than mine, was making my heart race. Nervousness froze my body.

"It might sting a little, so please endure it."

"Ow!"

I made a small groan reflexively when the antiseptic was applied to the wound. Mitsuki immediately held my hand firmly and smiled gently at me.

"Do not worry, it will be done in a second."

As though coaxing a child, Mitsuki then wiped the antiseptic with cotton and applied a large band-aid to the wound.

"Okay, finished."

Mitsuki released my hand and ended the treatment.

"—Thank you."

"Not at all, you are welcome."

Mitsuki answered with a delighted smile.

"It feels like... you're very happy."

Feeling strange, I asked her. Mitsuki widened her eyes and showed surprise on her face.

"Is that how I look?"

"Yeah."

"Then perhaps it is because—It has been a while since I finally got the chance to look after you, Nii-san. Because lately, you seem to be helping me all the time."

Mitsuki scratched her face, seemingly quite embarrassed and turned her back to me.

"Well then, Nii-san, get changed quickly and come to the dining hall, because I would like to eat breakfast together with you."

Saying that, Mitsuki left the room without looking back.

"Got it, I'm freshen up and get changed as fast as I can."

Touching the band-aid Mitsuki had applied for me, playing the role of her older brother, I replied.

Twenty-five years ago, the first dragon suddenly appeared in the sky above Japan—"Black" Vritra.

Causing massive calamity while moving across the world, Vritra had vanished as suddenly as it had appeared.

And starting from that point in time, children possessing the same ability as Vritra's began to be born among humans.

These children were known as Ds.

Just by thinking silently, these Ds were able to generate dark matter that could be transmuted into all kinds of substances. Currently, they were gathered to live at Midgard, an island far south of Japan with a diameter of several kilometers.

But three years ago, instead of Midgard, it was the military organization NIFL, in charge of handling dragon-related matters, that took me in.

I went through combat training at NIFL to become a member of the special forces team Sleipnir. Then for the next three years, I fought as a soldier on various battlefields. One day, I was suddenly reassigned to Midgard, and now, I was studying at the Academy like all the other Ds.

Indeed—Midgard was the self-governed educational institute of the Ds. Since Ds lost their powers after getting pregnant or reaching the age of twenty or so, all Ds at Midgard were at an age meant to attend school.

Life was very fulfilling and full of fun, going to school with people of the same generation. However, if there was one thing I felt unaccustomed to, it was the fact that there were no boys apart from me.

Although the reason was unknown, all Ds were born female. Currently I was the lone exception as a male D with the power to generate dark matter.

Hence, after Mitsuki and I left the dorm and started on our way to school, we became surrounded by school girls when reached the intersection where the road forked off to the girls dormitories.

When I first arrived in Midgard, the girls would stare at me from afar, making me feel very uncomfortable. But after returning from the Principality of Erlia, the situation got uncomfortable in a different sense.

"Kyah—!"

When Mitsuki and I appeared before the commuting school girls, they instantly screamed and cheered.

I jumped in fright instantly while Mitsuki calmly greeted them "Good morning, everyone."

"Good morning!"

Immediately the surrounding girls replied in unison.

Everyone stopped and gazed intently at us. Walking side by side with Mitsuki, I felt uncomfortable all over.

"What's with this situation..."

Hearing my quiet mutterings, Mitsuki looked up and said to me:

"This is the way things are. Because Brynhildr Class is currently regarded as the equivalent of heroes in Midgard."

"What heroes? That's way too exaggerated."

Hearing my answer, Mitsuki exhaled in exasperation.

"You are lacking in self-awareness, Nii-san. In anti-dragon combat so far, Brynhildr Class has always served as the mainstay of our forces. Apart from that, last time, we even defeated Hraesvelgr which was thought to be 'impossible to defeat by group tactics alone,' so being the center of attention is only natural."

"Hmm... Is that the way it works?"

Hraesvelgr was recognized as the hardest foe to deal with. For people to rejoice and feel particularly relieved after finding out that such a dragon had been vanquished, that I could sympathize. When Basilisk was defeated, everyone was ecstatic too.

But I got the feeling that this type of attention was different from last time's.

"But in your case, Nii-san, rather than a hero, it would be better to say you are seen as a prince."

"P-Prince?"

Hearing this term that suited me poorly, I felt quite troubled.

"This stems mostly from your relationship with Firill-san. Ever since returning to Midgard, rumor has it that she talked to many people about you, Nii-san, saying that you are like her Prince Charming—"

For some reason, Mitsuki's tone of voice was somewhat displeased.

Firill was my classmate who got targeted by Hraesvelgr. She was also a princess from the Principality of Erlia. I paid a heavy price to obtain victory in the fight to protect her.

"What Prince Charming, that's even more embarrassing than a hero..."

"However, Nii-san, you look very happy despite your claims on the contrary."

Mitsuki glared coldly and me then murmured quietly:

"...At this rate, someone might violate the rule against inappropriate interactions between the genders. I must pay more attention."

"Huh? Did you say something?"

"—Please pay it no mind. I was simply talking to myself."

Mitsuki replied coldly then quickened her pace.

I tried to ignore the surrounding gazes as much as possible and followed Mitsuki.

"Umm! G-Good morning!"

Along the way, several school girls greeted me. Seeing their eyes flash with excitement, I replied despite feeling troubled.

"Oh, good morning."

"...!"

Immediately, the girls blushed intensely and ran away. This situation repeated itself many times, but for some reason, Mitsuki's mood got increasingly worse.

"Nii-san, surely you must be happy to be so popular, but do not get carried away and disrupt public morals, okay?"

Mitsuki looked up to glare at me and warned.

"I-I know."

Oppressed by her inexplicably intimidating vigor, I nodded involuntarily. Perhaps feeling the tense atmosphere exuded by Mitsuki, fewer students came to talk to me after that.

However, there were also people who would not need to worry about that, namely, our classmates who belonged to Brynhildr Class.

"Oh, it's Yuu and Mitsuki!"

A joyful voice sounded from ahead.

Coming into view in front of us were some of our classmates. Since Mitsuki and I were walking rapidly, we soon caught up to them.

"Good morning, Yuu! Mitsuki!"

Chapter 1

The first to notice us was a young girl. She greeted us energetically. Between the strands of her pale hair, which looked pink under the light, two red horns protruded.

This girl was named Tia Lightning. Roughly two months ago, she had gotten out of the dragon-worshiping cult, the Sons of Muspell, taken into custody and sent to Midgard here. Her horns were not decorations but real horns conferred to her through the biogenic transmutation of dark matter by Kili Surtr Muspelheim, the leader of the Sons of Muspell.

Then the other girls in Tia's company greeted us too.

"Good morning, both of you."

Turning around with fluttering long blonde hair was Lisa Highwalker.

Despite her strict attitude towards me, she was a girl who helped others generously and was very considerate for her friends. It would not be a stretch to say that Brynhildr Class was united with her as the center.

"Good morning, Mitsuki, Mononobe-kun."

"Mm."

Next to greet us were the tomboyish Ariella Lu and the reticent redhaired Ren Miyazawa.

"Good morning, everyone."

"Good morning."

Mitsuki and I waved our hands in response.

However, there was one last person present—Firill Crest—holding a paperback in her hand. Instead of greeting us, she silently approached me.

"Firill?"

I looked at Firill doubtfully, only to see her close up her paperback, spread her arms and approach me with a hug.

"What!?"

Hidden under her uniform, two massive bulges pressed against me. That soft sensation was making my face heat up.

Watching from a distance, there was a commotion among girls.

"...Good morning, Mononobe-kun."

Standing on tiptoe, Firill whispered in my ear. Feeling her breath against my ear, my heart jumped intensely.

"Wait, Firill-san! What are you doing suddenly!?"

Mitsuki screamed.

"I'm not doing anything. This is just a hug. An ordinary method of greeting, filled with love."

However, Firill answered nonchalantly in a calm tone of voice.

Despite hearing noisy screams and cheering in the surroundings, she seemed completely unfazed.

"L-Love?"

Intimidated by her forcefulness, Mitsuki could not help but falter.

"It's so unfair that Firill gets a hug! Tia wanna hug too!"

Tia circled around behind me and hugged me from behind. Sandwiched between the two girls, I could not move.

Despite her young age, Tia's body still had feminine curves, no matter how small, and the softness unique to girls. Surrounded by the two girls' body warmth and fragrance, I could not help but feel dizzy.

"Even Tia-san too! Even if it is a greeting, this excessive intimacy is forbidden in public. It is detrimental to public morals!"

Red in the face, Mitsuki forced the two girls to separate from me.

"Mitsuki so stingy!"

Tia grumbled unhappily while Firill backed away obediently.

"Sorry, then I'll pick somewhere without people next time."

However, Firill left behind those words when she returned to Lisa's side.

"That is even more unacceptable!"

Mitsuki yelled angrily, glaring at me with her face blushing to her ears.

"Nii-san, stop letting others have their way with you. Fewer problems would arise if only you could pay more attention."

"I-I'll be more careful."

Intimidated by Mitsuki, I could only nod.

"—Putting that aside, I wonder what's up with Iris? Why hasn't she appeared..."

To change the subject, I looked for the girl who was not here. Including me, Brynhildr Class had a total of eight students. One person was still missing—Iris Freyja.

"Speaking of Iris-san, she overslept. We decided to leave for school first because she did not leave her room and it was getting late."

Lisa sighed while answering me.

"I see... But anyway, I guess she's always like this."

Iris was a bit airheaded, often oversleeping or forgetting things.

"Had I not roused you from bed, Nii-san, you would have overslept too."

Hearing Mitsuki murmur that softly, Lisa looked at me in amazement.

"Don't tell me that you require Mitsuki-san to rouse you from bed every day?"

"N-Not every day. It's just once in a while when I oversleep."

"If you rely on Mitsuki-san to wake you up, that means the same thing. Goodness gracious... If you are still dependent on your younger sister, that means you are not a full-fledged man, got that? Look, your hair is sticking up a bit."

Saying that, Lisa smoothed my hair in a natural motion.

Seeing me and Lisa close together, surrounding girls screamed "kyah!" instantly again. Hearing the screams, Lisa instantly became self-aware and rapidly left me with her face bright red.

"W-What did you make me do!?"

"You're asking me? ...Lisa, you touched my hair on your own."

Feeling a bit shaken inside, I gave a matter-of-fact counterargument.

Watching our interactions, Firill smiled warmly and placed her hand on Lisa's shoulder.

"I understand how you feel, Lisa. Mononobe-kun is clearly so handsome, but he doesn't put up his guard against others. It makes you want to look after him, right?"

"Indeed, perhaps there is that side to him... Wrong, I am simply agreeing with what you said about him lacking vigilance! I don't find him handsome at all!"

Pointing at me with her finger, Lisa spoke in rapid fire.

Then as though trying to hide her reddened face, she turned her back to me and strode off to school.

"Time to go, everyone. If we keep chatting here, all of us will be late."

"Oh, wait for me, Lisa."

Firill ran after Lisa and we followed.

Watching us from afar, the other girls cheered and screamed noisily while resuming on their way.

Looking around, I found that the bystander crowd had increased a lot without me noticing.

I normally only had contact with my classmates, but whenever I was surrounded by girls from other homerooms like this, I got overwhelmed by the totally one-sided gender ratio.

Fortunately, class sizes were less than ten people in Midgard's system. I could not help but feel thankful for this bit of good luck.

Part 2

"Iris... is so late."

I arrived at school with Lisa and the others but Iris still did not appear when the bell rang for homeroom to begin.

The seat to my left remained empty. Sitting to my right, Mitsuki also had a worried expression.

"Shinomiya-sensei is already here."

After Mitsuki spoke, the classroom door immediately opened and our homeroom teacher, Shinomiya-sensei, entered.

This woman was Midgard's commander and also held the rank of colonel.

Shinomiya-sensei's black ponytail swayed behind her as she stood at the lectern.

"Rise."

Hence, Mitsuki commanded the class.

After confirming everyone had bowed and sat down, Shinomiya-sensei spoke.

"There are several important announcements today. Before that, let me inform you of Iris Freyja's condition. She is absent with a fever today, probably due to long-distance travel fatigue. If anyone else feels unwell, please report immediately to me and don't strain yourself."

After listening to the teacher, the students began to whisper to one another.

"...So she overslept because of a fever. If only I had checked carefully."

I heard Lisa murmuring in regret.

I worried about Iris too while thinking back to what had happened at the Principality of Erlia.

Iris had tried her hardest to recount to me my shared memories with Mitsuki that I had told her before I lost them, then comforted me, declaring she would definitely help me recover my memories.

Probably due to this psychological burden, she was much more exhausted than the others. Perhaps I was partly to blame for Iris' fever.

"Shinomiya-sensei, can I visit her after school?"

I raised my hand and asked the teacher.

"It's fine for the others, but since you are male... Entering a girls dormitory is rather inconvenient."

However, Shinomiya-sensei showed hesitation.

"Back when I was hospitalized from the battle against Kili, Iris came to visit me, so I'd like to cheer her up a bit."

Even so, I still pleaded with Shinomiya-sensei and did not give up. Arms crossed, she contemplated silently for a while.

"Hmm... Considering your merits during the battle against Hraesvelgr, I suppose a small wish of this sort ought to be indulged. So long as you adhere to my conditions, I can authorize you to visit her."

"Conditions?"

"Yes. Firstly, you must obtain Iris Freyja's consent. Secondly, a student of that drom must accompany you. Thirdly, you are not allowed to enter unnecessary places. Finally, you must leave the dorm before curfew."

Shinomiya-sensei raised four fingers and spoke.

"I understand."

"Very well. If you obtain Iris Freyja's consent and find someone to accompany you, report back to me during homeroom after sixth period."

After saying that, Shinomiya-sensei swept her gaze around the room once.

"—Any other questions? Then I will begin the announcements."

Shinomiya-sensei cleared her throat, paused for a moment then informed us solemnly.

"First of all, some not so good news. Hekatonkheir seems to have reappeared."

"In the end, it still appeared!?"

Mitsuki remarked with worry.

"Yes, it seems that Hekatonkheir still can't be killed permanently. Although it is not showing any signs of advancing here, we cannot rule out the possibility of it suddenly appearing in Midgard like last time, so please be prepared at all times, everyone."

Shinomiya-sensei demanded everyone's attention with a solemn expression then relaxed her demeanor.

"Then let's talk about the next item, which is not so serious a topic, although it might be a bit laborious for you..."

Shinomiya-sensei looked at us as though enjoying our misfortune.

"By laborious, do you mean we have another mission?"

Lisa asked Shinomiya-sensei.

"Well, in a certain sense, it does count as a special mission. Suggested by the principal—A school festival will be held one month later."

"S-School festival?"

Lisa spoke in puzzlement. The rest of us were equally surprised.

"When Midgard first started operating as a school, the number of Ds was quite small. The only event held was probably just the Christmas party at the end of the year. But now that the number of students and homerooms has increased, it should be possible to hold a relatively lively event—That's what the principal thinks."

After reaching this point in her explanation, Shinomiya-sensei lowered her voice slightly.

"This event was proposed not only for the students but also includes the significance of external promotion. I hope you will treat this school festival as a chance to make up for our mission failure last time."

Make up...?

I frowned, not knowing what this was about.

The last mission was heading to Firill's homeland, the Principality of Erlia, to protect Kili Surtr Muspelheim and transport her to Midgard.

However, Hraesvelgr attacked during the mission. Although we managed to defeat the dragon, Kili went missing.

But what did that have to do with holding a school festival?

"Kili Surtr Muspelheim publicly stated that NIFL has been eliminating anti-social Ds all this time. The influence of that statement still persists. And our inability to protect her has also marred Midgard's credibility. Thus, we are forced to prove to the outside world that Midgard is an educational institute, composed of Ds and founded for Ds."

"Speaking of which, will many external visitors come to attend the school festival?"

After hearing the explanation, Lisa asked.

Indeed, if we had to make a statement to the outside world, there would be no point unless we entertained external visitor.s

"Yes, we plan to invite VIPs from various countries, major sponsors, and relatives of students. Naturally, all of them will go through strict background checks."

Relatives—

Hearing this word, I felt my heart jump violently. Having lost my memories from before I was taken to NIFL, I could not even recall the faces of my parents. How was I supposed to face them if they came?

"Nii-san—We might be able to see Father and Mother."

But in contrast to my internal panic, Mitsuki said happily to me.

"...Yeah."

I smiled clumsily and nodded.

"Every homeroom will be required to prepare an activity for the school festival. Since Iris Freyja is absent today, we will delay the decision for now. I will find another time for you to discuss but before that, please plan your proposals. Also, Mononobe Yuu—"

Shinomiya-sensei called my name at the end.

"Yes?"

Wondering what it was about, I raised my hand and responded.

"The principal apparently wishes to speak to you regarding the school festival. Please report to the principal's office during lunch."

"Got it."

Although I had no idea why she wanted to see me, this was perfect, because I wanted to discuss with the principal about the wound that had appeared next to my dragon mark.

Feeling the band-aid on my left hand that Mitsuki had applied for me, I wondered what the principal wanted to talk to me about—

Part 3

When the lunch break arrived, I went to the principal's office as instructed.

The clock tower was where the Academy's important facilities were gathered. Destroyed by Hekatonkheir at one point, it had been rebuilt during our expedition to take down Basilisk. It was only now that I finally stepped into the restored clock tower for the first time.

I originally thought the principal's office might have been relocated, but the internal layout seemed almost identical to before. The principal's office was still on the clock tower's top level.

"—You came at the right time, Mononobe Yuu."

I knocked and entered the room. Originally doing paperwork at her desk, the young blue-eyed blonde instantly looked up. At first glance, she seemed to be

a girl the same age or slightly younger than me, but in fact, she was Midgard's chief administrator, Principal Charlotte B. Lord. The woman standing next to her, dressed as a maid, was the principal's secretary, Maika Stuart-san.

This room was the same as when I visited before. The curtains were tightly shut with a dim interior.

"Umm, I heard you wanted to talk to me about the school festival..."

I brought up the subject while feeling slightly nervous.

"Yes, there is one problem regarding the matter of inviting external visitors to take part in the school festival, but before that—"

The principal narrowed her eyes, stood up from her seat and approached me.

"Show me your left hand."

She turned her gaze to the back of my left hand where a band-aid had been applied, then ordered me.

"—Yes."

Impressed by how observant she was, I obediently extended my left hand.

"Is there any change in the dragon mark?"

"Actually, just like last time, a swelling appeared—Oh, hold on, I'll peel it myself."

I stopped the principal who was about to tear it off, and removed the band-aid carefully. To avoid causing Mitsuki unnecessary worry, I intended to put it back on later.

The principal stared at the exposed wound on my left hand then as before, extended her little red tongue and licked my wound.

"...I-I was curious since last time. What do you learn by licking like this?"

I felt a bit of a sting from the wound along with a tickling sense of pleasure, forcing me to shudder.

"This is my personal method of diagnosis, don't mind it."

"Method of diagnosis..."

Ignoring my puzzlement, the principal stared at the wound, moistened by saliva.

"—Just as expected, it doesn't disappear. Perhaps the fundamental properties themselves changed. Looks like it's a wound of the same nature as last time."

The principal muttered words which I could not quite understand. Despite merely licking with her tongue, the principal seemed to have conducted many analyses.

"Umm, Principal...?"

I called to her, hoping she could explain and help me understand. She looked up and glared at me.

"So—Have you tried it?"

"Tried it? Tried what?"

I asked in puzzlement, but the principal went "how dense" and sighed.

"Of course I'm asking if you tried to see whether you can perform new transmutations."

"...No, not yet."

Because I thought trying randomly might be dangerous, I wanted to confer with the principal first.

"Really? Then try it here."

"Eh? Are you sure? Shouldn't I go to a training site..."

"Don't worry, as long as you control the dark matter generated to a very small amount, even if there's an accident, effects will be minor."

"I-I understand."

I nodded then generated a sphere of dark matter on my left hand with a radius of one centimeter.

"—Great, what will it be this time? Speaking of which, so-called Ds are the rare people who wield the same ability as 'Black' Vritra. And among them, Mononobe Mitsuki even obtained the antimatter controlled by 'Purple' Kraken' whereas you have reproduced 'White' Leviathan's ability through antigravitational matter..."

The principal stared at the small sphere of dark matter hovering over my palm, then continued with excitement on her face:

"Although I did not receive any report when Mononobe Mitsuki gained a new ability, your dragon mark went through an unusual change before you created antigravitational matter. If the current wound near the dragon mark has a causal link to obtaining new abilities, then you should have obtained a dragon's power. Come, try it out quickly and show me."

Like a child, the principal tugged my clothing and urged.

"Uh... Now that I think about it closely, how do I test it?"

Generated dark matter was transmuted according to transmitted thoughts, hence I could not create something I did not know about.

"First try recalling the powers exhibited by the dragons you fought and defeated. Either 'Red' Basilisk or 'Yellow' Hraesvelgr. Considering past precedents, these two dragon's powers might very well have been inherited by Ds."

"—Got it."

I listened to the principal's instructions and started to concentrate.

I first pictured the red light fired from "Red" Basilisk's eyes. The terrifying ability known as "Catastrophe," capable of speeding up time.

However, the dark matter on my left hand did not change

Okay—Next one.

I recalled the appearance of "Yellow" Hraesvelgr that I had fought in the Principality of Erlia.

Hraesvelgr used golden particles as a medium and possessed a power known as "Ether Wind," capable of manifesting souls.

Then just as I pictured the particles enveloping Hraesvelgr's body, shining with golden light, instantly, the dark matter on my palm changed into tiny glittering particles.

"Oh..."

The particles shone with golden radiance. Flying up lightly into the air, they faded then finally disappeared.

"Wow, so you succeeded! What was that just now? Which dragon's power were you thinking of?"

With reddened cheeks, the principal asked me.

"Uh, just now, that was probably... the particles hanging around Hraesvelgr, capable of manifesting souls."

Amidst the delightful surprise of succeeding in a new transmutation, I answered the principal excitedly.

"Yes, Hraesvelgr's power, that's truly wonderful. Let's run through examinations and tests more concretely in a few days. Please cooperate when the time comes."

"Understood."

I was grateful too for a more definite check. After antigravitational matter, I seemed to have gained the ability to use Hraesvelgr's power, but this further baffled me right now.

Because speaking of which, I still had no idea what was the root reason why I became able to use the powers of dragons. To be honest, I did not feel happy about becoming stronger.

"However, if that was Hraesvelgr's ability just now, then there's a problem."

"Problem?"

Seeing the principal's worried expression, I cocked my head in puzzlement.

"Indeed, you tried to reproduce Basilisk's ability, right?"

"Yeah, but nothing happened."

"In that case, where exactly did Basilisk's ability go? Basilisk was defeated before Hraesvelgr, right?"

"Ah..."

Hearing what the principal said, I understood what worried her.

"You mean that someone else apart from me has already inherited Basilisk's power?"

I asked cautiously and the principal nodded solemnly.

"That's the only natural conclusion. Perhaps she has not noticed or is deliberately hiding it... There are many possibilities. But leave it to me to think about how to handle this."

Saying that, the principal left me and walked to her desk.

After sitting down forcefully on her grand chair, resting her elbows on the desk, she clasped her hands together, fingers crossed, looking extremely impressive. No—In fact, she really was quite impressive.

"Mononobe Yuu, please do not use Hraesvelgr's power lightly before you are examined. I will notify you of the examination time later."

"Got it, then I'll be on my way."

"Okay—No wait, wait! We didn't get to the main point!"

Just as I turned around to leave, the principal called to me frantically.

"Oh right, I was called here about the school festival."

I originally thought the conversation had ended, but scratched my head.

"That's right. Maika, hurry and get it done."

"Affirmative."

Maika had been waiting on standby in a corner of the room. Receiving the principal's order, she approached me.

"W-What's going on?"

Seeing me get nervous and wary involuntarily, Maika-san smiled sweetly.

"Don't worry, it will be over in an instant if you stay still."

Saying that, Maika-san knelt down and suddenly rolled my pants up.

"Uwah, hold on..."

"You have good-looking legs."

Ignoring my distress, Maika-san then rolled up my sleeves as well, staring at me as though confirming something. Then taking out a measuring tape from a pocket in her maid uniform, she started taking various measurements of my body. Due to being so close, Maika-san's massive bust was touching me through our clothing.

"U-Umm..."

Troubled because I had no idea what she was doing to me, combined with repeated contact with that soft bosom, my mind was already blank.

"My apologies, please endure a while longer, next is here and there..... Done, thank you for your cooperation."

Maika-san put away her measuring tape, bowed to me and walked away. Only after the soft sensation left me did I finally come to my senses.

"W-What the heck was that?"

I turned my gaze to the principal and demanded an explanation.

"Hmm, actually—No, I'd better not say for now. I'll tell you once preparations are complete. After all, it'd be a pain if you fled."

"I have a very bad feeling about this... Please tell me clearly."

Seeing the principal make an evil smile, I felt a chill along my back.

"Fufufu, it's best that you don't ask. Because if you found out, you probably won't be able to focus on preparing for the school festival."

"What... the heck are you planning—"

"Secret. Very well, we're done here. Get lost. Maika, show him the way out."

"Yes, thank you for your efforts."

Pushing my back, Maika-san drove me out of the principal's office.

"What the heck was that..."

Although the possibility that someone had inherited Basilisk's dangerous ability was quite unsettling, what gave me an ominous feeling was the principal's smile instead.

Hence, I walked to the classroom while not knowing what the future had in store for me.

Part 4

"So this is the girls dorm..."

After school, after emailing Iris to get permission to visit, I came with my classmates to the girls dorm where they lived.

Although the original condition was to ask someone to accompany me, since my classmates wanted to visit Iris too, everyone came with me except for Mitsuki who had student council work to do. Instead, Mitsuki prepared concise and easily-understood notes on today's lessons for me to take along.

"Please don't snoop around. It's very vulgar."

I looked up at the curved architectural design of the dorm but Lisa glared at me coldly.

"Come on... No matter what, it's not like I'll have lustful intentions from looking at a building."

I sighed and responded. Immediately, Firill peered at my face from the side and said:

"Really? I read in a book once that all men are perverts without exceptions."

"What the heck kind of book is that...? At least I'm not the kind of pervert that gets aroused by architecture."

"Then you're a different kind of pervert?"

"Stop nitpicking at my words."

Feeling that anything I said would be taken the wrong way, I slumped my shoulders dejectedly.

"Even if Yuu is a pervert, Tia doesn't mind at all!"

"T-Thanks..."

Although Tia tried her hardest to comfort me, my feelings were quite complicated.

"Tia, be careful what you say. If Mononobe-kun really is a pervert, he might do nasty things to you."

Hearing Ariella warn Tia in this manner, I became even more depressed.

"What are nasty things?"

"Huh? T-That's, umm..."

Questioned by Tia, Ariella went red in embarrassment. What the heck was she imagining?

Listening to such a conversation, Ren swiftly distanced herself from me.

"Ren?"

"Mm!"

I called to her but she glared at me with her face red. Now that the unfair label of pervert was imposed on me, Ren seemed to be guarding against me.

To avoid further provoking them, I decided to walk silently.

—Speaking of which, the person who had inherited Basilisk's power was possibly among these girls.

Rather, since the members of Brynhildr Class were the one who defeated Basilisk, the probability should be very high.

But as far as I knew, no one had reported an unusual symptoms after defeating Basilisk. Still, the principal said she would handle it, so I guess I should leave it to her for now.

Switching my thoughts, I passed through the dorm entrance.

The instant I entered the entrance hall, I felt cool air brush against my cheek.

The air conditioning was set at a suitable temperature and very comfortable. I saw the noticeboard in the entrance hall with all kinds of colored notices stuck there. Things seemed more vibrant here than Mitsuki's dorm. Due to the faint scent of girls indoors, I felt my heart rate rise inexplicably.

"Come this way."

I followed Lisa's guidance to head to Iris' room. Along the way, although I ran into girls from other classes several times, Lisa explained things for me each time.

Every room had a nameplate on the door. Judging from that, some students seemed to have roommates while others lived alone.

Walking along the second floor corridor, I reached Iris' room where the nameplate only had "Iris Freyja." It looked like Iris did not have a roommate.

"I shall enter first to tidy up the room. I expect it to be very messy still."

Saying that, Lisa knocked on the door.

"Iris-san, I'm coming in."

After confirming a muffled "Oh... Sure" response coming from inside, Lisa swiftly entered the room. Then we waited for roughly three minutes and the door opened from inside. Lisa waved to us.

"Please enter, it's now tidied up."

"...Pardon the intrusion."

I stepped into Iris' room nervously. During the trips to the volcanic island and the Principality of Erlia, I had entered rooms that were assigned to Iris at the time, but this was still my first time seeing her real bedroom, of course.

The floor was laid with a carpet with a calming color. A calendar hung on the wall. Unused spaces on furniture were decorated with photos and pretty shells, probably found on a Midgard beach.

Perhaps due to Lisa's tidying up, I did not find the place particularly messy.

Lying in bed, Iris smiled at us as we entered.

"Mononobe... Everyone... Thanks for coming to see me."

Iris thanked us in a feeble voice. I approached her and examined her face that was red from a fever.

"You look like you've got it rough... Are you okay?"

I brushed away her silver hair that was sticking to her forehead due to sweat. I touched her forehand with my palm to find that it really was quite hot.

"Hmm... Although it's rough, I've already taken my medicine... I'll get well soon enough, so don't worry."

I was slightly relieved to hear Iris' answer. Since she was allowed to rest in her own room after being diagnosed, it was probably not a severe flu. Since Midgard had a fully equipped medical building, a serious illness would have required her to be forcibly admitted to the medical building.

"These are the notes Mitsuki asked me to bring. It includes today's announcements and lesson content. Also, she asked me to tell you to take care."

I took out the notes from my school bag and placed them on the sideboard next to the bed.

"...Thanks, help me thank Mitsuki-chan."

"No problem."

I nodded. Then as though waiting for our conversation to wind down, Firill and the others instantly gathered around Iris' mattress and started talking to her.

"I bought jelly and sports drinks. I'll put them in the fridge."

Firill raised the plastic bag in her hand.

"I brought fruit. If you're hungry, let me peel an apple for you?"

Ariella held up a red apple and asked Iris

"Tia and Ren bought snacks together!"

"Mm."

Tia and Ren presented a gift box of snacks.

"Iris-san, get well soon."

After wiping off Iris' sweat, Lisa applied a cold sheet to her forehead.

"I'm so happy... everyone, thank you so much."

Perhaps feeling too touched, Iris had tears in the corners of her eyes while she thanked eyes.

Hence, after we encouraged Iris and did everything we could to look after her, Lisa said to Firill, Ariella, Ren and Tia:

"I think having so many of us here is too noisy and Iris-san will not be able to relax. Let us leave the rest to Mononobe Yuu."

"I agree. That way, Iris will cheer up more. Since she has a flu, I'll let her have special treatment just for today."

Firill smiled suggestively and nodded to concur.

"Eh? But is okay to let Mononobe-kun and Iris to be alone? It's because that's not too appropriate that Shinomiya-sensei added a condition to require someone to accompany them..."

However, Ariella objected with a slightly troubled expression.

"I will wait outside the door, so there won't be any problems. If Mononobe Yuu shows any signs of making an indecent move, I will rush into the room immediately and punish him."

Despite answering Ariella's question, Lisa glared sharply at me. I felt cold sweat slide down my cheek but this was probably her method of being considerate for me.

"I promise I won't do anything requiring punishment from you, Lisa."

Hearing me swear seriously, Lisa nodded with satisfaction.

"Please keep that promise no matter what. Then I shall leave Iris-san in your hands. I will escort you to exit the dorm when you're leaving."

Thus, the girls left the room one after another and the room suddenly felt spacious with a silent atmosphere.

"Why... is everyone being so nice?"

Lying in bed, Iris looked at the door and murmured.

"That's because they all love you, Iris."

Lisa would probably reply "because classmates in the same homeroom are family" but the way I saw it, everyone's actions stemmed from simple affection.

"Then... Is it the same for you, Mononobe?"

Blushing, Iris looked up at me and asked.

"W-Well—Yeah, compared to the others, I love you more, Iris. More than anyone, I worry more about you. That's why, for my sake, you have to get well soon."

Enduring my embarrassment, I answered her.

"For... you, Mononobe."

But for some reason, Iris' expression became gloomy.

"What's wrong?"

"—Sorry, Mononobe."

"Huh?"

Hearing her suddenly apologize to me, I was baffled.

"Right now, you're clearly the one suffering the most... Mononobe, you lost your memories with Mitsuki-chan and I clearly have to support you... I clearly promised to help you regain your memories... But I haven't done anything."

Iris showed chagrin in her face and forced these words out.

Only after hearing her say that did I understood how heavy a psychological burden Iris was bearing.

Since I had entrusted my *memories with Mitsuki* to Iris before I lost them, Iris was giving herself too much pressure, feeling that she must help me.

Furthermore, Iris had declared that she would help me recover my memories even if it meant defeating Yggdrasil.

Iris was sincerely angry and sad on my behalf about the theft of my memories.

Putting aside whether it was actually possible to regain my memories, Iris' thoughts and feelings were already giving me sufficient salvation.

However, Iris was seriously searching all this time for a way to recover my memories. Relentlessly challenging a question that had no answer would bring a lot of mental stress.

"Iris, you've already helped me enough. I'm the one who should apologize. Sorry for making you overexert yourself."

It was all because I relied too much on Iris. I was responsible for this.

"N-Not at all, Mononobe, you did nothing wrong."

"No, in my mind, I probably gave up on getting my memories back already. Earlier, I think I was shoving everything on you because I thought it's impossible to recover the memories. But doing that is wrong."

I spoke regretfully then chose to correct my mistake.

"From now on, I'll think carefully to see how I can get my memories back... I'll search for that method together with you, Iris, rather than have you shoulder everything alone."

I placed my hand on Iris' cheek and vowed while staring into her eyes.

"Mononobe..."

Irisi' face was hot and her eyes moistened.

My heart was pounding loudly.

We were gazing at each other up close. Our faces naturally leaned in.

My mind was blanked out. All I could think about was Iris.

My heart rate increased. Our breaths mixed together.

Iris' lips, exhaling hot breath, was drawing me to them—

"Oh... N-No, you'll get my flu."

But just before our lips touched, Iris blocked her mouth with her hand.

"R-Right."

Brought back to my senses, I frantically separated from her.

Although it was a bit embarrassing, amidst a silence that tugged at our heartstrings, Iris and I peered at each other's face.

"Mononobe, your face is so red."

"You too."

"Because I've got a flu."

At the end of this exchange, we both laughed at the same time.

After our laughter resounded in the room and vanished—The room returned to silence, but it was a comforting kind of serenity.

"—Mononobe, thank you. I'm very happy that you're saying we'll find a way together."

After a while, Iris said calmly.

"You don't need to thank me. It's something that logically I'm supposed do, but it's just that I haven't."

"Even so, I'm still very happy. To be honest, the only method I thought of is defeating Yggdrasil... But that doesn't necessarily mean your memories will recover for sure..."

Iris smiled wryly and confessed that she had run into a wall.

"Yeah, we know too little right now. It's not a good idea to blame Yggdrasil for everything."

"...Mononobe, do you really think Yggdrasil is standing on our side?"

Hearing me speak in support of Yggdrasil, Iris watched me with worry.

"I don't trust it completely. But thanks to Yggdrasil, I was able to save you and the others. That's the truth too. I'm very grateful to it about this and I'd like to uphold my contract with it."

"Contract?"

"I obtained data on powerful weapons on the condition that I exterminate all dragons apart from Yggdrasil Excluding Vritra which has gone missing, the revived Hekatonkheir is the only dragon left. If that thing could be killed off completely... Yggdrasil's goal might be accomplished."

I thought of the dragons that had been vanquished so far while I spoke. Two years ago, "Purple" Kraken was taken out. In the last three months, we

defeated "White" Leviathan, "Red" Basilisk and "Yellow" Hraesvelgr. Of the original seven dragons, only three remained, of which "Black" Vritra had never surfaced again after disappearing twenty-five years ago.

"Hekatonkheir revived?"

"Yeah—Shinomiya-sensei mentioned it this morning."

"I see... But won't it be dangerous to fulfill Yggdrasil's wish? We don't know what it plans to do once the other dragons are gone, right?"

"Well—"

I found myself at a loss for words.

I used to think that exterminating all dragons apart from Yggdrasil was close to impossible, so I never thought that deeply about it.

But in fact, Yggdrasil's objective might be after that.

"I still cannot forgive Yggdrasil for making you go through so much suffering, Mononobe... And I believe we mustn't lower our guard. If we don't all possible precautions ahead of time, we might end up being exploited for nothing."

Despite her state of fever, Iris' gaze was still very serious.

"That's why, although you might not want to, Mononobe—How about asking someone else for advice?"

"Huh?"

It troubled me to hear Iris' suggestion. I could not help but exclaim in surprise.

"I've been thinking about this the whole day. As much as I want to help you, Mononobe... At this rate, I might not be able to do anything and end up wasting time pointlessly. So, I'm wondering if we should get more assistance?"

"But I—"

"I know, Mononobe, you don't want Mitsuki-chan to know, right? Also, it could be troublesome if the higher-ups heard about it, right?"

"Yeah."

If Midgard's superior organization Asgard learned about this, I would undoubtedly be placed under strict surveillance. I would be quarantined as a traitor or even executed.

"However, I think there are people who'll keep the secret and help us. So let's try finding someone trustworthy to discuss."

"Someone trustworthy huh..."

My classmates' faces flashed in my mind.

Considering the girls who had fought alongside me many times, surviving many crises, gradually getting to know each other, I could trust them but—

"You're worried about getting them involved and causing trouble for them, right?"

Lying on the bed, Iris stared at my face and smiled wryly.

"That... goes without saying."

She had guessed what was on my mind. I avoided eye contact and nodded.

"Mononobe, you're so kind, but you have to cherish yourself more..."

Perhaps her fever was getting worse, Iris spoke with some suffering.

"Iris—"

I held her hands as though covering them up.

"Please, Mononobe. You don't have to decide now, but could you think over it?"

"...Okay."

Although this was not a conclusion that could be reached so easily, I promised Iris would consider her suggestion.

Perhaps relieve to hear my answer, Iris relaxed her body and closed her eyes.

Before long, I heard quiet breathing noises.

Hence, I released her hands gently, left the bedside and walked to the room's entrance.

I exited the room as quietly as possible, only to see Lisa, leaning against the wall in the corridor, turn her head to look at me.

Everyone else had probably returned to their own rooms. They were not in sight.

"Already done? There is still some time until curfew."

"I'm done, Iris is sleeping now so I decided to leave."

Hearing my answer, Lisa left the wall and walked over.

"Then I shall see you off to the entrance."

"Thanks for your help."

I thanked Lisa then walked with her side by side.

—Find someone trustworthy to discuss huh...

Recalling what Iris said to me, I stared at the side of Lisa's face.

Although I trusted every classmate, if I had to pick someone as the most reliable, Lisa would be the first to come to mind.

For the sake of Mitsuki who was tormented from guilt for killing her own best friend, Lisa could play the role of "the character who condemned Mitsuki's crime" persistently for as long as two years. That was the kind of girl she was, considerate for her friends and possessing great mental strength.

She had openly declared that classmates were equivalent to family, supporting all of us with strictness sometimes and gentleness on other occasions. If it was her, she would probably help me.

Hmm... Hold on. On further thought, Lisa still considered me a "probationary classmate," right?

Thinking I was still not acknowledged as a member of Brynhildr Class, I felt a bit unconfident.

"Is there something on my face?"

Noticing I was staring at her, Lisa asked me with a surprised look.

"No, I suddenly remembered something. Thinking back, I'm still a 'probationary classmate,' right?"

"Probationary classmate?"

Lisa cocked her head, evidently not understanding what I was talking about.

"After defeating Leviathan, Lisa, you mentioned promoting me to 'probationary classmate,' didn't you? But after that, you never promoted me again."

"And I was wondering what on earth you were talking about... I've long forgotten something so far back."

Looking at me, Lisa looked totally exasperated.

"Come to think of it, Lisa, have you already acknowledged me as a classmate?"

"Huh? W-Well, umm..."

Confronted with my question, Lisa blushed and reacted with awkwardness.

"And?"

"—Who cares! Decide for yourself!"

Lisa turned her face away fiercely and replied in anger, but this answer was equivalent to saying she acknowledged me.

She quickened her pace and kept moving forward, almost leaving me behind.

"Wait up."

I frantically chased Lisa. Because we walked so hastily, we reached the dorm entrance within the blink of an eye.

"Well then, off you go."

Sending me to the door, Lisa bid me farewell coldly, turned around and was about to return to the dorm.

"Oh, Lisa, one last thing. Can I ask a question?"

Watching Lisa's back as she receded away, I asked her.

"...What is it?"

Despite making a displeased look, she still stopped and looked back candidly.

"Suppose I said I needed your advice on something, Lisa, will you hear me out?"

"—If you are truly in trouble, I will help you. But if you're just trying to push trouble onto me, then I will rectify your character flaw."

Hearing Lisa answer so readily, I was quite surprised.

"Even if what I want to discuss is a very tricky affair?"

"Tricky or not is irrelevant. The key point is whether help is necessary. So—What would you like to discuss with me?"

Lisa stood arms akimbo and urged me to speak.

"N-No, I said 'suppose,' didn't I? I just wanted to check, that's all."

Because it was not something to discuss at this location and I had not yet prepared myself to talk to her either.

Hence, I frantically swept it under the rug.

"—Is that so? Then I shall take my leave."

Although Lisa should have noticed the wavering in my heart, she departed without pursuing the matter.

"Okay, see you tomorrow."

After saying goodbye to Lisa as she left, I turned around and departed too.

Whether to discuss with her or not, I'd better leave the decision a bit later.

While praying for Iris to come to school in good health the next day, I started walking back to Mitsuki's dorm.

Part 5

Chapter 1

"Good morning!"

Perhaps the heavens heard my wish—The next day, Iris greeted me energetically then entered the classroom together with Lisa and the other residents of the girls dorm.

"Good morning. I'm glad you recovered from your flu."

Iris approached and I greeted her in turn.

"Yeah, I'm fully recovered."

Iris made a victory hand sign to emphasize her recovery.

I originally worried that she was forcing herself, but she really seemed to be well.

—Hmm?

I sensed someone's gaze vaguely, so I looked back, only to meet Lisa's eyes.

"!?"

However, Lisa instantly looked away in panic.

She was probably curious after I mentioned yesterday about having something to discuss.

While everyone was exchanging pleasantries and getting seated, Iris stopped walking to talk to Mitsuki.

"By the way, Mitsuki-chan, the notes I received yesterday talked about holding a school festival. Is that for real?"

"Yes, it was the principal's suggestion, to be held a month later. Since you are here today, Iris-san, I think we should discuss and decide what we will present as a class."

"Wow~ I'm looking forward to it! Mitsuki-chan, do you have something you want to do?"

"I have basically picked out several orthodox projects... But I do not plan on pushing any individual choice in particular."

Mitsuki answered solemnly. It seemed like she had set her boundaries clearly. Her responsibility was to provide choices to the class.

"How about you, Mononobe?"

Iris raised the same topic with me.

"Hmm... I don't really have an opinion either way."

To be honest, the term school festival did not evoke any feeling in me at all.

Due to losing all my memories beyond three years ago, I did not have any concrete impressions of school festivals.

"Come on~! You need to think about it more seriously!"

"If many suggestions are made, I'll choose among them seriously. What about you, Iris? Is there any activity you'd like to do?"

"Of course! I—"

Just as Iris was about to answer, the warning bell rang.

When the noisy clanging stopped, Iris smiled mischievously.

"—I'd better keep it secret for now. I'll propose it later."

Saying that, Iris returned to her seat.

Her excitement made it feel as though she did not just recover from illness. I could see how happy she was at the prospects of holding a school festival.

Next, just as Mitsuki said, during morning homeroom, Shinomiya-sensei announced a change to first period, to use that time to decide what our class was going to present at the school festival.

"—Thus ends the announcements. Mononobe Mitsuki will now chair the proceedings."

"Understood."

Mitsuki took Shinomiya-sensei's place at the lectern. After looking at everyone, she spoke:

"Then to begin, I would like all of you to nominate candidate activities. Does anyone have suggestions?"

The first to raise her hand in response to Mitsuki's question was Iris.

"Yes!"

"Please tell us, Iris-san."

"I want to do goldfish scooping!"

"......Huh?"

After a period of silence, Mitsuki showed a shocked expression.

"It's one of those stalls that always show up in Japanese festivals, right? I saw it frequently in the manga Firill-chan lent me."

"Uh, although school festivals are festivals, the meaning is a little different from that kind of festival..."

"It's no good?"

Iris asked sorrowfully.

"No, I am not saying it is no good, just that on a practical level, I believe that preparing goldfish will not be easy. This is because Midgard has strict regulations on bringing live animals into the Academy."

"I see... What a shame."

Iris put her hand down, disappointed from the bottom of her heart. It looked like she really looked forward to scooping goldfish.

"Any other suggestions?"

Mitsuki sought ideas again. This time, Firill put her hand up and spoke:

"How about a haunted house? We could do a Japanese-style haunted house."

"An excellent suggestion. In Japan, it is featured in every school festival."

Hearing a normal idea, Mitsuki seemed a little relieved while writing Firill's suggestion on the blackboard.

Sitting in front of me, Tia then looked back and asked me.

"Yuu, what's a haunted house?"

"It's a kind of entertainment venue where people dress up as scary monsters or ghosts to frighten visitors."

Although I had lost all memories more than three years ago, I had not lost any knowledge. Even without memories of visiting a haunted house, I still had that level of basic knowledge.

"Eh!? Tia hates being scared."

"It's okay. Even if we're doing a haunted house, we'll be the ones scaring others."

"But Tia is scared of becoming a monster too..."

Hearing her say that, I gasped.

—Becoming a monster.

Those words evoked the image of Ds targeted by dragons, turning into the same type of dragon.

Other people heard our conversation. Ariella smiled wryly.

"Looks like we'd better scrap the haunted house."

"Mm."

Ren concurred with Ariella.

"Yeah, because everyone having fun comes first."

Mitsuki exhaled lightly then wiped the words "haunted house" from the blackboard.

"No other ideas?"

Mitsuki sought opinions for the third time but no one raised their hand this time.

"Then to get some measure of direction, I will provide several examples."

Saying that, Mitsuki listed out what could be considered school festival cliches.

Drama performance, cafe, dancing, singing, music performance, planetarium, maze, movie, fortune telling, exhibition—

Fluently providing plenty of examples to the class, Mitsuki had evidently done prior research.

"I am not simply asking for you to pick from these. For example, there are many types of drama performances, such as plays, puppet shows, picture story shows, etc. I would appreciate it if everyone could use these as references to offer specific plans."

After listening to Mitsuki, everyone began to think seriously.

While I staring at the words on the blackboard, racking my brain, sitting to my left, Iris raised her hand again.

"Mitsuki-chan, can so-called cafes sell food?"

"Yes. Normally speaking, snacks are added to the menu."

"Then I think a cafe is best. Besides, I'd like to eat tasty food too."

Iris seemed to have voted for a cafe with food enjoyment as the priority.

"Hey, we're not opening a shop for gorging ourselves, you know?"

I confirmed with her from the side but Iris nodded as though she knew from the start.

"But we can taste test many dishes, right? Actually, if possible, I originally wanted to try eating goldfish once."

"—Hold on, Iris, what do you think goldfish scooping is about?"

"Eh? Don't you eat the goldfish after scooping them out?"

"Wrong, they're not for eating!"

Hearing this gigantic misconception on Iris' part, I could not help but scream.

"Then why do we scoop them out?"

"I think most people take them home to keep in an aquarium..."

"O-Oh I see, because Japan has sashimi, I was thinking they're for eating."

After knowing it was her misconception, Iris scratched her head rather embarrassedly.

This was typical Iris, so I could only smile wryly.

"Nii-san, Iris-san, please do not get too off-topic."

Mitsuki reminded us with exasperation.

"Oh, sorry."

"Sorry, Mitsuki-chan."

After Iris and I apologized, Mitsuki circled "cafe" while sighing.

"—Iris-san wants to open a cafe. Any other opinions?"

"I agree with opening a cafe. All of us cooking together and serving customers, that sounds like fun."

Lisa supported Iris' idea. All the others nodded with no objections.

Since there were only eight students in the class, collecting opinions was very fast.

"So, let us brainstorm the cafe idea."

Mitsuki rubbed out the other suggestions and continued the discussion. Hearing her say that, Ariella asked incredulously:

"Since we picked the cafe, isn't what we're doing all decided now?"

"Even a cafe has many different types. For example, in Japanese school festivals, the majority are maid cafes or cosplay cafes, etc, namely, cafes accentuate themselves by adding in their own unique appeal."

After hearing Mitsuki's answer to Ariella, Lisa concurred "indeed."

"Deciding on our selling point is very important. However, I believe that maid cafes are not unique enough, because a maid's job is naturally to serve customers. There's nothing novel about that."

"I agree."

Firill concurred with Lisa.

Lisa and Firill apparently knew each other from high society before coming to Midgard. Having lived life at the top, they probably found maid cafes unrefreshing.

"I don't really know much about appeal, but since we're cooking anyway, I'd like to cook fish in Japanese style."

Iris offered her opinion again.

Although she was probably still thinking about goldfish, this suggestion itself was not bad. Mitsuki looked like she thought the same thing as me. Under "cafe," she wrote down "fish cuisine."

"If fish is the ingredient, it should be approved as long as we apply to Midgard. But ingredients go bad easily in Midgard where it is hot and humid, so they will not allow us to make sushi or sashimi. If we are doing Japanese cooking, I believe grilled fish will be the method."

"As long as it's Japanese, anything's fine! I'm happy as long as I learn to make one dish."

Iris' reply was inexplicably motivated. Then she glanced at me.

"Oh~ So Iris, you're interested in cooking."

I felt a little surprised and commented. Iris blushed red and answered quietly:

"Umm... Because I was thinking... If I could learn Japanese cooking, Mononobe, you'd probably be happy..."

"What—"

Hearing Iris say something like that shyly, I felt my face instantly heat up.

But apart from me, other people apparently heard what Iris had said. Tia also joined in the conversation.

"If Yuu will be happy, Tia will learn cooking too!"

Then Firill also faced me and said:

"Although I've never cooked before... I'll try my best too."

Witnessing this scene, Lisa shook her head in exasperation.

"Then this is equivalent to a decision. If we are going to serve grilled fish, why not simply unify everything to Japanese style and switch to a Japanese teahouse instead?"

"Oh, that's great. In that case, we'll wear Japanese clothing to serve customers, how's that? I like wearing outfits that are like national clothing."

Ariella concurred with Lisa's suggestion.

There were no opposing opinions after that. Everyone began to discuss constructive ideas such as using green tea for drinks and the like.

"—Then we of Brynhildr Class will decide on a Japanese teahouse. Any objections?"

Mitsuki asked everyone for a final confirmation.

"Looks like there is no dissent, then it is decided. After school today, I would like everyone to start preparing. However, since I must direct the overall school festival, I will not be able to oversee our class."

As the student body president, Mitsuki's workload was quite heavy.

"Consequently, I would like to select two classmates to lead the class as members of the festival executive committee. Any volunteers?"

"—I shall do it."

Before Mitsuki had a chance to wait for people's reactions, Lisa raised her hand matter-of-factly.

How amazing of Lisa...

Precisely because she was well aware of her own position and competence, she could act without hesitation like that.

"Thank you, Lisa-san. Then the other spot will be filled by Nii-san."

"Huh? I didn't say anything, did I?"

Suddenly put on the spot, I frantically asked Mitsuki.

"Because you are the only boy in the Academy, Nii-san, it would be problematic if you did not work industriously. Also, there is plenty of physical labor, right?"

Hearing her say that, I could not refuse.

But seeing as I intended to work hard for everyone in the first place, I had no complaints.

"—Understood, I'll take on this job."

"Very well, I am counting on you, Nii-san."

Mitsuki smiled sweetly.

Thus, we started preparing for the school festival that was to be held a month later.

Chapter 2 - Bubble Engagement

Part 1

Crossing the ocean, crushing the land, the blue monster advanced forward.

Its gigantic body, towering into the clouds, almost seemed to intimidate the sky itself.

It was called the blue dragon—"Blue" Hekatonkheir.

Recovering no matter how many times it was attacked, reappearing even if its entire body was destroyed, Hekatonkheir was known as the "Undead."

Now that everyone know how pointless it was to get in its way, even countries with combat ability would not wish to oppose it.

After fighting long and hard, humans learned from experience. The wisest way to deal with Hekatonkheir was to avoid its travel route and wait for it to leave.

Hence, the blue monster continued walking on its way without meeting any obstructions.

Simply moving in a straightly, ignoring mountains, rivers and oceans, it kept advancing.

Hekatonkheir's direction was headed towards the green dragon in a faraway land—"Green" Yggdrasil.

Certain people found its route of advance quite unusual.

After all, despite leaving tracks all over the world, Hekatonkheir had never made contact with another dragon, not even once.

But even after someone discovered that Hekatonkheir was behaving differently from before, they did not know what might result.

Thus, without anyone realizing what Hekatonkheir's objective was, that moment was approaching second by second.

Part 2

Having decided what kind of shop we were going to open for the school festival, Brynhildr Class went to work on preparations.

As representatives, Lisa and I stayed after school in the classroom to discuss details in the planning.

"—So the school festival will be held for two days."

I looked at the school festival schedule and spoke. The school festival's dates were set on a Saturday and Sunday roughly a month from now.

"Yes, so two days' worth of ingredients need to be prepared. Furthermore, manpower should be assigned according to Day 1 and Day 2 so that everyone gets a day of free time, how's that?"

Sitting opposite me across the desk, Lisa recorded our discussion while offering her ideas.

"I think it's a good idea. Everyone wants to check out what the other homerooms are doing. Then we need to scale the teahouse so that it can be operated smoothly by four people."

Brynhildr Class had eight students, just the right number for four people to a group.

"Yes, but Mitsuki-san will be busy with student council affairs. I don't expect her to be able to say with us the whole time. The executive committee members will have to assist on this front."

"Understood. So it's best to divide groups after listening to everyone's opinions. They'll surely want to be free if their parents are coming on a certain day."

Shinomiya-sensei had mentioned about inviting parents. My father and mother might be coming too.

I started feeling down as soon as this crossed my mind.

In my current state, I could not even recall their voices. If possible, I did not want to meet them.

"...Yes, let's do that."

But after hearing my answer, Lisa sounded slightly gloomy, so I asked:

"Oh... Are your parents unable to come, Lisa?"

"No, they will definitely come, because they are major sponsors of Midgard as well."

Lisa sighed and answered. For some reason, she did not seem happy at all.

"Major sponsors... Just as I thought, Lisa, your family is very rich."

I already knew that she frequented high society, but this was my first time hearing that her parents were major sponsors of Midgard.

"Rich huh? Judging by your description, you do not know about the Highwalker Group."

Staring at me, Lisa looked totally exasperated.

"Huh? Is it that famous?"

"It is a business conglomerate in Western Europe with numerous subsidiaries. I thought you were intentionally feigning ignorance all along..."

"Haha... Sorry, I simply didn't know. How should I say this? My earlier life was too far removed from that kind of world."

Hearing me explain, she shook her head in disbelief.

"I remember you said you were from NIFL, didn't you? Let me state for the record, the Highwalker Group's ties with NIFL are far more intimate than those between it and Midgard, you know?"

"R-Really?"

Getting a feeling like I was cornered, I asked in return.

"Under the Group, there are industries in military production. The majority of weapons used by NIFL were manufactured in the Group's factories."

"—Then without knowing it, I've been enjoying your Group's care."

Although I could use transmutation to create Nergal and other firearms, other equipment such as flashbang grenades or tear gas were all standard-issued

supplies. It felt quite strange to learn that those supplies were all manufactured by Lisa's family business.

"So that is how it is... But there's nothing glorious about being arms dealers."

Lisa remarked with a complicated expression. It seemed like she had many misgivings about the family business.

"Life must be tough for an heiress of that kind of corporate group."

"Indeed, it is surely a hundred times tougher than you imagined."

Lisa shrugged and smiled wryly. She was probably not exaggerating.

"...You don't seem too happy about your parents visiting. Are you on bad terms with them?"

"No, we are on excellent terms as family, but right now, due to certain reasons, I am reluctant to meet them. That's all."

"I see, then it's similar to me."

I felt an inexplicable sense of camaraderie and accidentally blurted it out. It was too late by the time I realized in alarm.

"You don't want to meet your parents either?"

Lisa asked me in a probing manner.

"Oh... Umm, it's because I've got reasons too."

"Would it be related to the matter of discussion that you mentioned yesterday?"

Lisa raised a sharp question, forcing me to break out in cold sweat.

"Uh..."

"Then I seemed to have guessed correctly. If it is troubling you to the point of wishing to avoid your parents, I am willing to hear you out. Please don't be shy and tell me as much as you can."

Lisa leaned forward, bringing her face closer to mine. Under the gaze of those gemstone-like eyes, I forgot to breathe for a moment.

"—No, it's fine."

I was almost about to confess everything but I managed to shake my head and decline.

"Hmph... Do you mean to say that I cannot be relied on?"

"That's not it. It's just that you have your own troubles, right? I can't burden you with my troubles when I clearly know that."

Lisa would definitely dedicate her full effort in trying to help me find solutions. Precisely because of that, I must not confer with her when she was facing her own troubles right now.

"You don't need to mind my affairs."

"—But I do mind. Asking me not to mind is impossible."

I stared into Lisa's eyes and answered.

"What..."

Lisa's face went red. She looked very awkward.

"It's the same for you, Lisa. If you have any troubles, feel free to discuss with me. I'll do my best to help you."

"T-That is why I said don't mind my affairs! It has nothing to do with you!"

"Maybe you're right, but don't tell me there's absolutely nothing I can do to help?"

Questioned by me, Lisa seemed to let her gaze wander indecisively.

"Well... No, even if there was, your matter is more important at the moment."

"No, Lisa, your troubles are equally important to me."

Precisely because I saw Iris fall ill from straining herself, I absolutely refused to compromise on this point.

"How obstinate..."

"The same goes for both of us."

We faced off for a while then Lisa sighed as though giving up.

"—Fine, I shall compromise."

"Compromise?"

"Yes, I'll first have you help resolve my problem. Then with that, you can discuss your problem without reservations, right?"

Lisa stared at me with widened eyes. Confronted with her extraordinary pressure, I could only nod hesitantly.

"Well, I guess that sounds about right. But even though I said I'll help you... Is what's troubling you something within my power to help?"

"Yes. As much as I hate to admit it, I just realized that it is something that can be resolve simply with your assistance, despite my extreme reluctance, that's all."

For some reason, Lisa was answering with anger in her voice. Her face also seemed a bit red.

"—Understood. Then please tell me what I need to do."

Preparing myself to do anything that was asked, I urged Lisa.

"Ooh..."

However, Lisa blushed, glared at me but did not say a single word.

"Lisa?"

Hearing me call her name, Lisa's shoulder shook.

"U-Umm... Let me be clear, I have no other intentions, got that? Also, if you're unwilling, you are allowed to decline."

Wringing her hands several times, fidgeting restlessly, Lisa issued a prior declaration first.

"I don't plan on refusing no matter what you'll have me do, because it's your request, Lisa."

"Ooh..."

Lisa's face went even redder. Was her request something so embarrassing?

"Then I-I shall start?"

"Yes."

I nodded clearly and waited for Lisa to speak.

After several deep breaths, Lisa said in a trembling voice:

"M-Mononobe Yuu... May I ask you to be my b-boyfriend?"

Part 3

During the lunch break the next day, Iris and I had bought bread and drinks at the snack shop and were having lunch at the benches on the roof. Due to strong sunlight, very few students had lunch outdoors so the roof was empty.

Naturally, I chose to eat at a deserted location so that I could explain to Iris about the favor Lisa was asking me to do.

I summed up yesterday's conversation and nervously told Iris that Lisa had asked if I could be her boyfriend.

In that instant, the melon bread in her hand dropped to the floor.

"O-Oh~ So Lisa-chan confessed to you."

"No, it's not a confession—"

"Then Mononobe... H-How did you answer?"

I frantically explained but Iris interrupted me, questioning me in a strong tone of voice.

"—I haven't given my reply yet."

"Then what are you planning to do?"

Iris asked me immediately.

"If possible, I want to accept her request."

I told Iris my intentions.

From the very start, I intended to agree to Lisa's request no matter it was, just that because its nature came completely unexpected and I needed to discuss with Iris first, so I asked Lisa to give me one day to consider.

"—Eh? Is that really okay when you clearly insisted on not hurting Mitsuki-chan? Although you forgot, Mononobe, you and Mitsuki-chan promised during your childhood to marry each other in the future, you know?"

"It's okay. As long as the whole story is explained to Mitsuki, she'll surely understand."

Hearing me say that, Iris showed a shocked look then slumped her shoulders dejectedly.

"I see... So you already like Lisa that much, Mononobe. In that case, not getting your memories back will probably be happiest for you, Mononobe. Ahahaha, I... totally wasted my efforts."

With tears in the corners of her yes, Iris laughed feebly.

"W-Wait, don't jump to conclusions! This isn't about liking or confessions at all! I'm acting as Lisa's boyfriend for just one day!"

"...Eh? Just one day?"

Iris stared in surprise with her mouth open.

"Lisa asked me to pretend to be her boyfriend when her parents visit for the school festival."

Like Iris, I almost got the wrong idea in the beginning, but Lisa explained: "Although I said boyfriend, it's actually just *an act*."

"Pretending to be a couple... Why?"

Still stunned, Iris asked me.

"She hasn't told me the reason. If I refused, she probably wouldn't want me to pry too deeply into her problem. But even if I accepted, all I'm doing is *an act*. Just by doing that, I'll apparently resolve Lisa's troubles."

"I-I see now..."

Iris remarked in relief.

"But since we have to pretend to be a couple... If that's not okay with you, I intend to refuse. Then I'll just have to get the story out of Lisa somehow and find another solution."

"Mononobe..."

Tears fell from Iris' eyes.

"Woah! W-What's wrong?"

"You're so considerate of my feelings... I'm so happy, because I thought you didn't love me anymore, Mononobe."

"Nothing like that at all. Sorry for giving you the wrong idea from the way I worded things just now."

I placed my hand on her cheek and wiped her tears away with my thumb.

"...If you'll give me half of your yakisoba bread, Mononobe, I'll forgive you."

Looking at her melon bread that had fallen on the floor, Iris chuckled.

"Got it."

Taking my hand off Iris' cheek, I tore my yakisoba bread into two and gave her half.

"Great—Now I forgive you."

Iris wiped her tears on her uniform sleeves and began to take large bites of my yakisoba bread.

Then after a while, she said quietly:

"If it's just one day... Sure."

"You're not forcing yourself?"

The first to finish eating my bread, I was looking up at the blue sky. Then I looked at Iris.

"Yeah, because Lisa is in trouble, Mononobe, you must help her."

"...Got it."

"I'm counting on you, oh, but—"

After I nodded, Iris smiled and brought her face up close.

"I-Iris?"

Just as I faltered, Iris touched my cheek lightly with her lips and tongue then withdrew.

"Your face doesn't look good with bits of seaweed stuck there."

Iris spoke with a blush. Seeing her like that, I felt my face heat up too.

"What... I-In that case, you could've just told me."

"True, but I wanted to do it just now."

Iris scratched her face shyly then spoke somewhat hastily.

"Next period is homeroom time, right? Are we going to discuss the school festival again?"

"Yeah. First, we'll announce what Lisa and I were discussing after school yesterday, then we'll decide on the detailed menu and how we're going to assign essential tasks here on."

Hearing me say that, Iris cocked her head in puzzlement.

"Assigning tasks huh... If I get assigned to cooking, that means I'll need to practice, right?"

"Yeah, probably."

I nodded affirmatively while thinking I might need to ask Mitsuki to instruct the class on cooking.

"If I cooked something, Mononobe, will you taste test it for me?"

"Of course."

"Really!? Then it's a promise, okay?"

Iris said happily, showing a smile even more lively than usual.

Part 4

During homeroom that day, the Japanese teahouse's refreshments menu was decided to offer a set meal of grilled fish, rice, miso soup and tamagoyaki. As for drinks, apart from green tea, black tea and other choices were included.

Although uniforms were going to be kimonos, instead of ordering pre-made ones, we would make them ourselves.

Hence, in preparation for the upcoming school festival, our essential tasks were cooking practice and costume making.

As the executive committee members, our first step was to hurry with writing orders for the required cooking ingredients and fabric.

"How many forms exactly does it take..."

Seeing the thick pile of paperwork on the desk, I could not help but grumble.

Every item purchased required detailed specifications and an explanation on its purpose. Apart from that, due to providing information to multiple agencies, it required filling out several forms that were almost identical.

It would be much easier if this could be done on the computer, but these documents were required to be filled in by hand. Purchasing and other important procedures related to outside of Midgard apparently accepted only documents of this type.

This was most likely because they needed proof that Ds were handling the procedures themselves.

"If you have the time to gripe, you might as well do the work. Time is precious."

Sitting on the neighboring seat, Lisa was working silently and gave me a vicious glare.

"I know... But no matter how I rush, I'm not going to finish before school closes."

"If you're not going to finish, please take it home and continue to work. Ordered supplies need two weeks to arrive, so the application needs to be made as early as possible."

"S-So it takes that long..."

Since I had never applied for deliveries from the outside world before, I was quite surprised when Lisa told me that. Food ingredients were less of an issue, but costume making could not begin until the fabric arrived.

"—Understood, I'll get them all written by tonight no matter what."

Now that I knew that any delays would add pressures to work times, I could not afford to be sluggish.

I focused on filling in the forms and moved my pen rapidly.

My efforts were rewarded at least. By the time the setting sun's rays streamed in through the window, less than half the paperwork remained.

It was almost time for school to close. If I took the rest back to fill in at the dorm, I should be able to finish within today.

"Phew..."

Finally seeing the finish line in sight, I breathed a sigh of relief.

Next, there would be no time left to discuss unless I brought up the "fake couple" matter.

I glanced at Lisa to see what she was doing, but ended up meeting her gaze.

Lisa was also looking at me. She frantically faced forward as a result.

Clearly our work had reached the point where we could call it a day for now.

"Say, Lisa, about yesterday's topic—"

I intended to give a reply to her request from yesterday, so I spoke to Lisa.

"!? Y-Yes."

Lisa's body froze while she returned her gaze to my direction. From the way she looked, perhaps she had been looking for an opportuty to talk about yesterday's topic.

"Lisa, I will accept your request."

"Y-You will?"

Lisa confirmed with me a bit nervously.

"Yeah. Just by pretending to be a couple for one day, your troubles will be resolved, right?"

"—Yes. By doing this, I should be able to get through this occasion."

"Can you tell me the whole story?"

Before knowing whether I was going to accept or not, Lisa refused to tell me the story behind the request. But now that I had agreed to play the part of Lisa's boyfriend, I had to acquire a definite grasp on the situation.

Lisa nodded lightly and spoke with a gloomy expression.

"Actually, my parents demanded a long time ago that I had to hurry and choose a fiance."

"A fiance?"

"Yes, this is the destiny that comes with being born as an heiress, no—More accurately, it was determined even before birth. I heard that back when I was still in my mother's womb, many people wanted to arrange engagements with me already."

"What... That's abnormal, before you're born..."

Hearing me exclaim in surprise, Lisa smiled wryly.

"It is nothing rare in families wielding vast amounts of authority and wealth. I believe my father and mother already count as parents who give their children a fair amount of freedom."

I recalled what she had said about not being on poor terms with her parents.

"Then as long as you ask, Lisa, they should give you the freedom to choose your husband, right?"

"—Of course I've asked already, and my parents gave me the freedom to choose a suitor from among candidates they've approved."

Lisa remarked sarcastically.

"No, I don't think that's freedom at all..."

"Perhaps, but my parents believe that such freedom is sufficient."

Lisa's voice showed weariness.

Most likely, this was something she had discuss with her parents many times already.

However, Lisa had not succeeded in expanding the freedom offered by her parents, which was why she was troubled right now.

"Then in that case, if I pretend to be your boyfriend... How does that help?"

To be honest, I really did not think Lisa's parents would approve of me.

"They can't possibly acknowledge you as my prospective husband. Precisely because of that, I'm asking you to do this."

"What do you mean?"

I frowned, unable to understand Lisa's intent.

"On this occasion, my parents will probably demand that I pick a fiance, because the candidates cannot keep waiting forever. But so long as I tell them I have a boyfriend, my parents would probably back down on their own without saying anything."

"Really? I think they might say: 'This kind of guy is no good! Break up with him!'"

I acted out my impression of an obstinate father, but Lisa smiled wryly.

"My parents aren't the stupid and emotional type. They know clearly that they cannot interfere forcibly while I am currently a D."

"Yeah... No matter how much they oppose you going out with me, as long as we're still in Midgard, they can't pull us apart."

"Indeed, they are very smart and gentle, parents who are considerate for their child. While I am in Midgard, they won't question my games of youth."

Conveying resignation in her words, Lisa laughed.

"You said while you're in Midgard... Then what about afterwards?"

"—You have no need to be concerned with what comes after. So long as I am temporarily liberated from the pressure of selecting a fiance, that is enough."

Lisa extended her hand towards me without answering my question.

"Well then, Mononobe Yuu, this is the true story. May I ask you to play the role of my boyfriend? Please relax, things will definitely not develop into actually marrying me."

Some parts still worried me but regardless of the true story, I had already made my decision in my heart.

"...I understand. I accept the request."

I nodded, reached out and held Lisa's hand.

"Thank you, then this resolves my troubles. Now it's your turn."

Holding my hand firmly, Lisa stared at me with a serious expression.

Just as she said, it was my turn to discuss the matter of my memories, but—

The bell rang to urge all students to leave the school.

"There's no time today, let's talk about it next time. Mine is a long story."

"...No helping it."

Lisa sighed and released my hand reluctantly.

We packed our things rapidly and left the classroom together.

"I must hand in the application forms early tomorrow. Please arrive earlier to school tomorrow. I won't accept tardiness from you, got that?"

"Understood, I'll set my alarm clock half an hour earlier than usual."

"Oh my? You made a mistake, right? Shouldn't you say you'll ask Mitsuki-san to wake you up earlier?"

"Come on... I normally get up on my own. It's only when I oversleep that Mitsuki wakes me up."

While carrying this kind of conversation, we walked along the deserted corridor.

Our footsteps and voices sounded especially loud.

After the conversation ended, we descended the stairs silently.

"Mononobe Yuu—I have a question."

Along the way, Lisa broke the silence and asked in an especially cautious manner.

"Question?"

"Yes, although you've accepted my request... How exactly do you intend to play the part of my boyfriend?"

"Huh? Well, umm—"

I was at a loss for words. My gaze wandered.

Indeed, on further thought, I did not know what to do.

"How unreliable..."

"W-Well, we just have to act lovey-dovey in front of them, that's enough, right?"

Lisa glared at me coldly so I had no choice but to give a vague answer.

"What do you mean by lovey-dovey? You have to be more specific or else I won't understand."

"How should I put it? Like hugging and exchanging sweet words, something like that."

I racked my brain desperately to give examples of acting lovey-dovey.

"Speaking of which... When the actual occasion arrives, will you be able to do those things suddenly?"

Prompted by Lisa's question, I tried to run a simulation in my mind.

'Lisa, you're so adorable.'

'No, you're so handsome.'

Imagining Lisa and I, locked in embrace, flirting with each other—I could not help but clutch my head.

"...I can't do it."

It was way too embarrassing. Just imagining it was already unbearable.

Even if I knew it was an act, I did not think I could do it.

"I know, right? I can't do it either. So it looks like—practicing might be necessary."

"Practicing?"

"Yes, practicing to look like a convincing couple."

Lisa was originally a body's width away from me. After saying that, she came close and wrapped her arm around mine.

Feeling my elbow touch Lisa's voluptuous bust, my heart pounded intensely.

"H-Hey, your chest..."

"I know. Don't lose composure. This sort of distance is very normal for a couple. This is supposed to be even easier than a hug."

"But you're going red too, Lisa."

"T-That is due to the setting sun!"

However, Lisa's arm was trembling faintly. I could feel that she was very nervous.

If Lisa's parents were to see us as we were now, they would not think we were going out.

"Pretending to be a couple is harder than I thought."

"...I-Indeed, me aside, you are totally off."

Lisa's blushing face looked down. Nodding in agreement, she then continued in a hoarse voice:

"Umm... The day after tomorrow is Saturday, a holiday. Do you have any plans?"

"Huh? If there's no work related to the school festival, I should be free."

"Oh, don't worry on that front. So long as the applications are handed in, there is nothing urgent at the moment."

Lisa seemed to breathe a sigh of relief while she spoke, but I did not understand what she was getting at.

"Are we doing something the day after tomorrow?"

Hearing my question, Lisa spoke with a solemn expression:

"To ensure that we definitely look like a convincing couple when the time comes, we must focus on special training! You will accompany me for the entire day after tomorrow. I will also listen properly to your matter then."

Part 5

After staying up all night to get things done, I successfully handed in the application forms the next day. Then the following day after that, I was at the seashore some distance away from Mitsuki's dorm.

Sitting on a breakwater under the shade of coconut trees, I stared out blankly into the distant horizon.

Although noon had not arrived yet, the sun was shining fiercely. Since it was a holiday, I left the house casually dressed in a short-sleeved shirt and pants. Even so, my forehead was still sweating.

Today was designated by Lisa as a day of "special training." Leaving the dorm slightly early, I waited for her arrival.

At the appointed time, I heard footsteps approaching.

On this seaside road that traced out a gentle curve, Lisa appeared. As soon as I saw her attire, my breath was taken away.

Lisa was wearing a sunhat with a white sundress that exposed her shoulders.

Currently, she exuded an air like a sheltered young lady on a summer vacation. This dreamy sense of beauty was in stark contrast to her usual forceful impression, forcing me to stare in mesmerization for a while.

"—Thank you for waiting. T-Then off we go."

Carrying a basket, Lisa spoke to me nervously.

"O-Okay."

My answering voice also seemed quite stiff.

As soon as I stood up, Lisa immediately took my arm in an inexperienced manner. Perhaps because the fabric of her clothing was thinner than last time, the softness of her bosom felt even more distinct than before.

"S-So we have to walk arm in arm after all?"

"Of course, because today's objective is to grow accustomed to behavior as befits a couple. By the way—before that, shouldn't you be saying something first?"

Red in the face, Lisa stared coldly at me.

—Oh.

Figuring out her demand, I gulped and spoke up:

"The dress suits you a lot. You look very pretty in it."

"Ooh..."

Hearing me say that, Lisa immediately blushed red to her ears and turned her head away.

"—I-Indeed, that is correct. Although it is very ordinary flattery, I shall give you a passing grade for that."

"No, it wasn't flattery. I seriously think so, you know?"

"~~~~! Enough!"

Lisa spoke sharply then pulled my arm forcefully.

"G-Go this way, I shall take to my specially treasured location. It is a place where virtually no student in the Academy knows of."

"A special secret place? I'm looking forward to it."

I followed her directions and walked with her.

I could not help but recall dancing at a ball in the Principality of Erlia when Lisa's soft bosom had made contact with me as well. My heart pounded uncontrollably.

Whenever I took a step, my elbow would feel an extremely elastic sensation. I tried my hardest to ignore that feeling and turned my gaze to the nearby scenery.

The seaside walking path was laid with asphalt along the island's edge, tracing out gentle curves. On the other side of the breakwater, a white beach and blue ocean stretched as far as the eye could see.

—I remember I first met Iris somewhere around here.

When I was thinking about this, Lisa pinched me in the arm.

"W-What are you doing?"

"—Nothing much, except I got a vague sense that you seem to be thinking about something completely irrelevant. It doesn't count as practicing unless you pay proper attention to me."

Lisa glared at me sideways, her cheeks still blushing red.

"You want me to pay attention to you... But I won't be able to stay calm like that."

"Do you really understand? There is no need to stay calm. Do you think there are any couples who engage in lovey-dovey behavior calmly?'

"...No, I guess."

I answered after thinking briefly. Indeed, that would not be classified as a couple.

"Unless we can act natural while staying conscious of each other, we won't look like a couple. Please get used to this."

"Aren't you setting the bar too high?"

I doubted if there was a need to be so thorough, but Lisa shook her head in disagreement.

"No, my parents won't be deceived unless we go that far. So let us do our best. I-I feel embarrassed too..."

Perhaps due to nervousness, Lisa's arm was trembling faintly.

Indeed, since Lisa was pushing her so much already, I must not lose to her.

"—Got it, then let's do our best."

To calm down the trembling Lisa, I smiled at her.

"Oh..... V-Very well."

Lisa paused for a moment then as though regaining her senses, she nodded and agreed.

In this manner, we kept walking along the road that followed the island's outline.

The shore became more and more rocky while the road gradually went uphill.

Before long, we had gotten quite far from sea level. The coastline in this area were all towering cliffs.

Since I had memorized Midgard's overall layout, taking a guess from our walking distance, we had probably circled halfway around the island.

From what I could see, there were no buildings in the surroundings. The inland side consisted of a dense jungle.

"—Here it is."

However, Lisa stopped walking in this place where there was nothing.

"Huh? I don't suppose we're entering the jungle?"

"No, look down the cliff."

Lisa approached an unfenced part of the cliff side and urged me to look down.

I did as she instructed, leaned over the fencing and looked down the cliff.

The fringing reef jutted high above the sea surface. These rocks enclosed a portion of the sea to form a small inlet. The inner edge of the inlet was a beach where gentle waves broke over it.

"Wow... That kind of place is normally quite difficult to find."

"And that is why it is a specially treasured location. Come, we will descend."

"Descend... But there's no path?"

Seeing me looking around in puzzlement, Lisa smiled wryly.

"If there's no path, just fly down. It is within our power as Ds. Could you please hold this for a moment?"

Lisa handed me the basket she was carrying, then pushed her empty hand forward.

"—Gungnir!"

Accompanied by a stern shout, Lisa's fictional armament manifested. Holding the golden spear composed of dark matter, she point at the basket in my hand.

"Do not drop that basket no matter what, understood? Then off we go."

Lisa took me arm in arm and we floated into the air together, By transmuting dark matter into air, she created air currents to fly.

Due to my extremely low dark matter generating capacity, I could not achieve such a skill, hence I still had not gotten used to this floating feeling yet.

I hugged the basket tightly to prevent it from falling, then waited for the brief flying journey to end.

"There—We have arrived."

The feeling of sand underfoot was accompanied by Lisa's voice. I breathed a sigh of relief.

Then I looked across the inlet.

This place was wider than my first impression. The cliff side slanted greatly inwards near the bottom, which was why this place was hard to see from above.

"It feels like a secret base."

"Well, that is true indeed, because this is a secret location that only Ds capable of flight may enter."

"You can't get here by boat?"

"No, there are many fringing reefs nearby, preventing boats from approaching. Due to turbulent waves outside of the inlet, swimming here is also very dangerous."

Lisa answered me while using her fictional armament to transmute a vinyl sheet to spread on the beach. Then she snatched the basket from my hand.

"...What's inside the basket?"

"I'm not telling yet. You'll find out later. Please focus on the special training right now. Since there is no fear of being seen by others here, we can do embarrassing thing as much as required."

"E-Embarrassing things?"

Lisa's wording caused my imagination to go wild. My face involuntarily heated up.

"I meant nothing weird by that, okay?! Please do not get the wrong idea!"

"I-I know... Then what kind of special training is next?"

Hearing me ask that, Lisa placed the basket on the vinyl sheet and took off her hat.

"Speaking of what could be done here, there's only one thing, right?"

Blushing intensely, Lisa untied the shoulder strap of her dress.

As she pulled the neckline of her dress open, pale skin and her cleavage instantly entered my view.

"Huh? W-What are you doing—"

"Do you even need to ask? Y-You too, strip now."

"Strip!?"

Lisa kept stealing glances at me. Shyly, she clutched the hem of her sundress. Hesitantly, she gradually lifted up her skirt.

Seeing those very soft-looking thighs gradually exposed, I could not help but gulp.

"Q-Quit staring at me! Arghhh, goodness gracious... Stripping slowly feels even more embarrassing. In that case, I'll simply do it in one fell swoop!"

"Wait—"

Then Lisa removed her dress in one breath—revealing a dazzling swimsuit look before my eyes.

"Huh...?"

I involuntarily made a stupid sound while Lisa stared at me in amazement.

"Why are you so surprised? I must have emailed you yesterday, telling you to put on swimwear before coming here, right?"

"Oh... Now that you mention it, that's true."

My brain was totally sluggish due to nervousness, even to the point of forgetting I had come here wearing swimwear underneath. I guess Lisa was occupying so much of my attention that I had forgotten everything else.

Hence, I hastily took off my clothing while checking out Lisa's swimsuit look.

Her black swimsuit was extremely skimpy. Her voluptuous breasts almost looked like they were going to pop out.

"That swimsuit looks really good on you. I can't described it very well—Anyway, it's very attractive."

Before I got reminded this time, I hastily took initiative and stammered in praise of Lisa's swimsuit.

"T-Thank you for the compliment..."

Even so, I suppose I managed to get a passing grade on this. Shyly shielding her chest with her arms, Lisa thanked me.

Thus, we stared at each other's swimwear.

Due to Lisa fidgeting awkwardly, her bosom, impossible to hide, was wobbling intensely.

It looked extraordinarily sexy, making my heart accelerate to an insane degree.

"Next comes swimming, right?"

Since Lisa did not speak for a long time, I took initiative to ask.

If this continued, with us face to face in our swimwear, my emotions were about to get abnormal.

"N-No, swimming alone would not count as special training. We need to frolic on the beach like a couple. Hence—This comes first."

Saying that, Lisa handed a small tube to me.

"Sunscreen?"

An idea occurred to me as I read out the words on the tube, then I looked at Lisa

"—You seem to understand. S-So, please do the honors."

Lisa nodded with a blush then lay down forward on the vinyl sheet.

The beautiful lines from her waist to her buttocks entered my view. Holding sunscreen in my hand, I froze.

"What's the matter? Hurry, no need to be shy. I have prepared myself already."

"O-Okay."

Hurried by Lisa, I nervously knelt down beside her.

Seeing the pale and flawless skin before me, I gulped involuntarily.

"You only need to apply it on my back. I've done the rest of my body already."

"—Got it."

Squeezing sunscreen onto my palm I cautiously touched Lisa's back.

"Hyah!"

Lisa cried out and her body shook.

"What's wrong?"

"N-Nothing, I simply cried out reflexively."

"Then I'll keep going."

Touching Lisa's back, I smoothed out the sunscreen.

My heart accelerated on its own while I was feeling Lisa's warm and smooth skin directly.

"Mmm... Ah... I-It tickles a bit."

Lisa emitted exceptionally sexy sounds, making it impossible for me to calm down.

Perhaps because of that, I applied too much force and my hand slipped on the sunscreen, accidentally touching Lisa's wonderfully shaped bottom.
Immediately, my palm felt a soft sensation almost like touching breasts.

"Hyau!? W-Where do you think you're groping!?"

Lisa jumped up and glared at me, her face red to her ears.

"S-Sorry, my hand slipped."

"...Honestly?"

"I'm not lying, please believe me."

I explained desperately then Lisa exhaled deeply.

"I understand—I shall assume it is so. And if we were a couple, that level of skin contact is only normal. We will enter the next stage."

Lisa grabbed my arm and went towards the sea.

Accompanied by splashing sounds, we entered the shallows to ankle depth, then Lisa released me and said:

"I've heard that couples would play around on the beach by splashing each other. We will put that into action right now. Mononobe Yuu, please get ready."

"Huh? O-Okay."

Urged by Lisa, I bent down and dipped my hands into the water.

"—Let us begin, take that!"

Scooping up seawater, Lisa threw water at me.

"T-Take that."

I imitated Lisa and splashed water at her.

However, after repeating the same action roughly five times, Lisa cocked her head incredulously.

"It does not feel particularly fun... Is there something we're doing wrong?"

"No, but if you ask that, I'd feel very troubled too."

I looked away and changed the subject.

I could not bring myself to say that Lisa's motions were causing her bosom to bounce, in combination with her wet body, I was staring in a trance.

"Hmm~ Perhaps we need to think outside the box a little. But even so, what other ways are there...?"

Saying that, Lisa crossed her arms and contemplated.

Seeing Lisa ponder silently, always treating everything so seriously without exception, I could not help but smile wryly.

"—Have you been here many times, Lisa?"

"Huh? Y-Yes, I come here every now and then for a change of pace..."

"Then can you tell me what do you usually do for fun where you're here, Lisa? Couples pretty much share their joys, right?"

Hearing me say that, Lisa gasped as though feeling impressed for an instant, then she immediately regained her senses and pointed at me with her finger.

"I-I know that too! However... Surely you cannot understand my manner of entertainment."

"How can we know if we don't try it? What needs to be done? Tell me."

After I asked her repeatedly, Lisa spoke hesitantly.

"...Just floating, that's all."

"Floating?"

"Relaxing on the sea, just floating on your back, doing nothing. Since the waters are calm inside the inlet, there's no worry of being washed out to sea."

"—Got it, let's do it together."

Taking Lisa by the arm, I headed for the sea.

"A-Are you really fine with it? Are you really fine with floating on the water until you're tired of it?"

"Don't worry, I don't dislike doing nothing."

Going slightly farther, our feet could no longer reach the bottom, so Lisa and I swam to the center of the inlet.

"I always float around here, but I still don't think it feels couple-like..."

"Then let's hold hands. That way, we won't drift apart and it's more couple-like."

I held Lisa's hand and floated on my back. By relaxing all unnecessary tension and controlling the balance properly, I wouldn't sink.

"F-For a suggestion from you, this is pretty smart."

Lisa clumsily gripped my hand in return and floated beside me.

What entered my eyes was a clear blue color.

The sky dominated my entire view.

I could see clouds drift by, slowly changing shape.

Holding hands with Lisa, I felt her body warmth pass to me.

"Oh—So this is the kind of feeling you enjoy, Lisa."

Completely relaxed, I remarked.

Due to the water's high temperature, it felt like being soaked in warm water.

"To think you are capable of understanding the merits of this... How surprising."

Lisa's reply did not sound as stiff as before.

Without any particular reason, I looked in Lisa's direction, only to see her facing me as well.

Our gazes met. She chuckled "fufu" then smiled faintly.

A smile surfaced naturally on my face too.

—What joy.

It was clearly nothing more than just floating, but that was what I truly felt.

This was the first time ever that I felt so close to Lisa.

In this manner, we floated on the sea, even forgetting the passage of time.

But before either of us got bored or exhausted, the end came.

Rumble, a cute stomach sound reached my ears amidst the sound of waves.

I looked to the side and saw Lisa holding her stomach, her face gone red.

"T-Time for lunch. In fact, I made sandwiches."

Lisa spoke rapidly to me as though trying to cover things up.

"—So that's what the basket contained."

"Indeed that it is the case. You should gratefully try out my personal cooking."

Part 6

"Come, bon appetit."

Sitting on the vinyl sheet, Lisa nervously opened the basket.

Inside were crooked looking sandwiches and a small water bottle.

"How should I put this...? The sandwiches look really handmade."

"No need to force yourself to search for words of praise. I'm aware that they don't look good. I've never cooked before so this cannot be helped. Come— This is black tea."

Lisa spoke sulkily then poured black tea from the water bottle into a cup.

"Thanks, then I'll begin."

Taking a crooked looking sandwich, I brought it to my mouth."

"...How is the taste?"

Lisa gulped and observed my reaction.

I had picked a tuna salad sandwich. The instant I took a bite, the fresh juices of vegetables and the savory richness of tuna expanded in my mouth.

"It's good."

I said my words almost subconsciously, then stuffed the entire sandwich in my mouth.

"You're not just... being polite?"

"No, it really does taste good. If it's this kind of food, I can eat an unlimited amount of it."

I replied while picking up a second and a third sandwich.

"Really...? Then my efforts are rewarded."

Lisa seemed to sigh in relief and started eating a sandwich too.

"It tastes so good even though you're clearly a beginner. I think you're amazing."

"Because it's just ordinary sandwiches. Anyone can make them taste good by following a recipe."

Lisa turned the head away coldly and replied, but I could sense her joy vaguely from the mood.

Having spent some time together on the sea just now, it seemed Lisa and I had grown much closer than before.

There were also egg sandwiches, fruit sandwiches and others. While we tried out all sorts of flavors, the basket soon became empty before we knew it.

"Hoo~ I'm so full. It's great stuff."

Finishing Lisa's sandwiches, I thanked her.

"I'm glad you're satisfied."

"Now all you need to improve is the appearance."

"—I will hone my culinary skills from now on. Seriously, could you keep that comment to yourself?"

Lisa pouted mildly then started tidying up.

Putting the water bottle and the cups back into the basket, she closed the lid. Watching her, I asked about what was next.

"Then what's next? Want to go for a brief swim to help digestion?"

Immediately, Lisa placed the basket on the vinyl sheet's edge and said solemnly:

"We could do that—But personally, I'd like to hear about your matter now."

Lisa moved closer, shoulder to shoulder with me, then drawing her knees up to her chest, she stared at me. With our bare shoulders touching, I felt my heart speed up.

"My matter?"

"Indeed, I would like to know what is troubling you."

Hearing her say that, I understood she wanted me to explain what I wanted to discuss with her.

"...It's better to save it for later. If I brought it up now, it'll probably ruin the mood and put an end to our special training."

Since what I wanted to discuss was quite a grave matter, it would surely disrupt the current atmosphere if I told her.

However, Lisa shook her head.

"No—Since it is troubling you that seriously, then I must ask you to tell me now all the more. I will listen to your troubles as if I were your lover."

Lisa urged me in a sincere tone of voice.

From her words, I could hear that she truly cared about me. I felt my heart wavering inside.

Most likely from the very start, Lisa was treating this as part of the special training, intending to hear my troubles.

I had said earlier that we had to share joys to look like a couple, then as a couple, it was only natural to share each other's troubles as well.

If Lisa believed that this was a necessary process in order to act more like a couple, I probably should not be too apprehensive.

"So, a lot of the story might be shocking to me... But please hear me out."

"Very well, leave it to me. I shall take on all of your troubles."

Lisa thumped her chest and promised. Seeing that massive bosom wobble intensely, I frantically looked away while starting to confess my secret to her.

Three years ago, I had made a deal with Yggdrasil in order to repel Hekatonkheir that was invading my homeland, thus obtaining data on pre-civilization weapons, most prominently the anti-dragon armaments.

But in exchange, I lost a portion of my memories.

Then during the respective battles against Leviathan and Hrasvelegr, I had sought new power in the same way, losing more of my memories—

I recounted everything in order.

Lisa's face went pale initially and asked me question many times, but later on, she could not say a single word.

The expression on her face resembled not only anger but also sorrow. Staring at me, she listened silently to me.

"—And this is how I can no longer recall any of the past beyond three years ago."

I told her the current state of affairs then voiced my current feelings.

"Initially, I thought it was a price I had to pay to obtain power, so previously, I had already given up on the memories. But Iris, the only one who knows about this, vowed to help me recover my memories no matter what... I've then decided to do everything I can, so—"

"...So that is why you sought me to discuss this."

Lisa finished my sentence.

Her voice was clearly filled with anger.

Despite feeling myself cower for an instant, I still nodded and admitted it.

"That's right."

—Smack!

I felt an impact on my left cheek. Lisa had slapped me.

Normally, I might have dodged reflexively.

But seeing the tears flowing of Lisa's eyes, I could not move at all.

"In any case—whether as lovers or classmates, I have judged this as the appropriate response."

Holding the hand that had slapped me tightly against her chest, Lisa quietly told me.

"...Yeah, I think you're right."

Feeling the numbing pain on my left cheek, I nodded and agreed with Lisa.

"Although Mitsuki-san, who shoulders many mental burdens alone, is also quite a nuisance—Your problem is even worse than hers! Deciding on your own to pay a price, deciding on your own to protect us, deciding on your own to suffer alone... How can you be so selfish!?"

Lisa scolded me harshly, but tears were flowing from her eyes.

"—Sorry."

"Rather than apologize, why didn't you ask for my advice earlier!? At least if you had confessed to me before the Hraesvelgr battle, there might have been another solution, more or less..."

Lisa showed chagrin on her face while her shoulders kept shaking.

"Sorry, it's not that I don't trust you, Lisa, but I absolutely don't want Mitsuki to know... That's why I couldn't speak out lightly."

I apologized to her again.

"If Mitsuki-san learns of this, she will surely be more angry and saddened than me—and hurt far deeper. But even so, I would think that she still hopes you will confess everything to her."

Lisa spoke bitterly then glared at me.

"—Lisa, you think that I should tell Mitsuki too?"

"If I had accepted your request for a discussion as your classmate, I might have insisted on that already. However, I am currently taking the standpoint of your girlfriend... Hence, I will respect your wishes."

Although Lisa did not seem like she accepted my way of doing things, she still said that to me.

"Thank you, Lisa."

"It is too early for thanks. I still haven't offered any suggestions about what you came to me to discuss. Frankly speaking, I never expected such a difficult problem."

Lisa exhaled as though to calm down her turbulent emotions and wiped her tears away with the back of her hand.

I felt sincerely grateful to Lisa whose eyes had reddened slightly from crying.

"Goodness gracious... It would be troubling if you were satisfied with this. Since you are relying on me, you must set your goal higher. Although it might not be possible immediately, I will try to find clues to help recover your memories, even if it means exhausting all possibilities."

After declaring that, Lisa changed postures, from having her knees drawn to her chest to sitting formally in seiza.

"So—In any case, you should lie down on my lap."

'Huh? W-Why do I have to do that?"

I was troubled to hear such a sudden suggestion. I kept looking back and forth between her pale thighs and her face.

"Just now, I was scolding you as your lover, so next, I will console you. Now then, hurry and lie down."

Lisa pulled my shoulders and had me lie down on the ground with my head on her lap.

The soft feeling of her thighs and the bodily fragrance from her skin was making my heart pound intensely.

Looking up, the majority of my view was dominated by her bosom that was slightly squeezed by her swimsuit.

"Uh... L-Lisa?"

I called her name anxiously. A warm hand immediately rested gently on my forehead.

"Even at the cost of sacrificing precious things, you decided to protect us—I am truly grateful to you. Although it is impossible to call what you did correct... Without you, I might have lost precious family already."

Lisa stroked my head while thanking me in a gentle tone of voice.

"You must be... suffering. Because you've worked so hard from the past all the way to the present, so even if it's just for now, please allow your body and mind to rest. I will stay here by your side."

"Oh..."

Her words permeated into the depths of my heart. I could feel the anxiety sticking to the bottom of my heart gradually disappear.

Lisa stroked my head. Her hand was making me so comfortable that I had to close my eyes.

"You can sleep if you wish. Right now, there is no one in this world who treasures you more than me, your lover, so please rest assured and leave everything to me."

Guiding me like a lullaby, Lisa's gentle words made me fall asleep naturally.

Thus, I slept peacefully on her lap. By the time I woke up, it was already dusk.

"—Sorry, I slept too soundly. Your legs must be numb and it was probably quite boring for you."

Along the way back, I apologized to Lisa who was walking by my side.

Back when I came to, she beamed at me and said "good morning" with a smile. As a result, I accidentally missed the timing to apologize to her.

"I switched postures several times in the process, so I didn't get numb. Also, there were many things to contemplate, so I didn't feel bored either."

Back to her hat and white sundress getup, Lisa replied while facing forward. And of course, I was back in my shirt and pants instead of walking in swimwear.

"Were you thinking of what I discussed with you?"

"Yes, and there was also watching your sleeping face. I don't think I can ever tire of it, you know?"

While walking arm in arm with me as when we started the day, Lisa smiled mischievously with her other hand carrying the empty basket.

"Does my face look that weird?"

"Rather than weird, it would be more apt to call it childish. It's almost like Tia's when she is taking afternoon naps, very adorable."

"Urgh."

I felt extremely embarrassed at the thought that I had shown such a vulnerable expression.

"Fufu, perhaps I should take a photo if there is a chance next time."

"Please, anything but that."

While we were chatting like that, we reached the spot where we met up by the time we realized.

Lisa swiftly released my arm and separated from me.

I felt a little unsettled that Lisa's body warmth, which had accompanied me for the whole day, had left me.

"—This ends today's special training. Thank you for accompanying me."

"Oh no, I'm the one who needs to thank you."

Seeing Lisa thank me solemnly, I scratched my head and responded. Since I was only sleeping for the second half, I felt quite bad about that.

"On my end, I seem to have acquired a grasp on behavior expected of couples. How about you?"

"Well, lemme see... Walking arm in arm naturally on the way back, I think it's progress."

Hearing my reply, Lisa nodded with satisfaction.

"Judging from the way things look, there shouldn't be a problem. Do not forget this kind of feeling. We will continue to practice."

"Huh? More practice?"

"Naturally, we must not get complacent before the real event. Nevertheless, we will probably be using pockets of free time in between preparing for the school festival to revise a bit of what we did today, so it won't take up your time."

Lisa replied confidently with her head high then said with a serious expression:

"In fact, I originally intended to have more training, but right now, your matter is more important. In any case, I will use the weekend to put together all known information regarding Yggdrasil. I believe that dragon still holds the key."

"Yeah, I'll review the lecture notes from all the lessons so far."

Indeed, researching the other party would a basic thing to do, yet until now, I never even thought of investigating Yggdrasil.

Or rather—For some reason, I did not want to investigate.

Perhaps just as Iris pointed out, my trust in Yggdrasil had gotten to *an unnatural extent*.

—Suspicion, unnecessary.

"...?"

I seemed to hear a tiny voice, so I looked around but there was no one else along the seashore path or on the beach.

"What's the matter?"

Lisa asked curiously.

"No, nothing, I guess it was my imagination."

"...Is that so? Then I shall take my leave here. See you in school on Monday."

"Yeah, see you."

Lisa turned around and left after I replied.

I watched her depart until she vanished on the far end of the road that traced out gentle curves, then started walking to return to Mitsuki's dorm.

But in that instant, my vision suddenly shook.

—Rectification.

"Gah..."

A moment's dizziness.

I steadied my footing immediately and did not allow myself to fall.

Was it the result of sleeping outdoors? I shook my head.

—Huh? Speaking of which, I think I was planning to do something when I get back...

I seemed to have something to investigate, but could not recall what it was.

Whatever, it was probably nothing important. Without dwelling on it deeply, I stopped thinking about it.

Part 7

On the Monday after Lisa's special training, Brynhildr Class officially began to work in preparation for the the school festival.

That being said, since the ordered supplies had not arrived, costume making could not begin yet.

Hence, the first thing to do was cooking practice—

"I-I'm going to cut it now? Can I cut it like this?"

Holding a kitchen knife unsteadily, Iris asked Mitsuki who was supervising everyone.

"Ahhh, wait! Did I not mention that the hand keeping the food stationary needs to be closed, held like a cat's paw!?"

Mitsuki corrected Iris with great alarm on her face.

"Tia will add the seaweed!"

"Stop! Too much! It expands suddenly in hot water, so just a little is enough!"

This time, Mitsuki was stopping Tia's actions.

What could I say? Watching the girls was making me gradually unsure of the outcome.

We were gathered in the home economics classroom to use fourth period's homeroom time for practice, trying out simple Japanese dishes. Any ingredients or equipment we lacked was taken from Mitsuki's dorm.

Mitsuki was the only one versed in Japanese cooking, so she had to walk around busily between the whole class.

Apart from Mitsuki, Ariella was apparently the only one with plenty of cooking experience. Although NIFL's survival training had taught me how to prepare

wild game when hunting, my experience in normal cooking was virtually nil. But in spite of that, my skills still came in handy.

"Mononobe-kun... You're very fast at cutting."

"Mm."

While I was cutting ingredients without taking, Firill and Ren, working next to me, watched with impressed eyes.

"Because I'm very used to working with blades, but I know nothing about seasonings, so I need to count on Mitsuki for that."

Seasonings in survival cooking was basically using spices to cover up gamey flavors, which was quite primitive and could not be used in delicate Japanese cooking.

"I'm done over here."

Ariella, who had been working on the opposite kitchen table, spoke to us.

"Phew... This is exhausting."

Finishing her work with Ariella's assistance, Lisa wiped sweat off her brow.

Thus, we finally finished before fourth period ended. Then we all started to eat when the lunch bell rang.

The menu consisted of plain rice, miso soup, tamagoyaki and grilled fish.

"Mononobe! I'm the one who cut up the turnip in the miso soup!"

"Tia added in the miso and the seaweed!"

Iris and Tia stared excitedly as they watched me pick up a bowl of miso soup.

"—Thanks for the food."

At their urging, I tried the miso soup first.

But in that instant, an unexpected taste of sweetness made me choke accidentally.

"C-Cough, c-cough... W-What's with this sweet miso soup...?"

Hearing me say that, Iris cocked her head in puzzlement.

"Eh? Did I put in too much sugar at the end?"

"I-Iris-san, I never gave any instruction of that sort in the first place!"

Mitsuki confirmed the taste frantically then questioned Iris.

"Because I thought it tasted a bit salty, I thought I could use sugar to adjust."

"In a case like this, just add water to dilute the flavor—"

Hearing Iris' answer, Mitsuki brought her palm to her forehead and sighed.

"Sheesh, Iris! Don't do things without asking!"

"S-Sorry..."

Even Tia was angry at her. Iris slumped her shoulders dejectedly.

"Haha..."

Just as I laughed wryly at their interactions, someone patted me on the shoulder from the side.

"Mononobe-kun, try mine... for a change of taste."

I looked back to see Firill bringing a piece of tamagoyaki, cut to bite size, to my mouth using her chopsticks.

"H-Hey—Oomph."

Before I could answer, the approaching tamagoyaki was shoved into my mouth.

Initially, it tasted like ordinary egg, but when I bit into it, an intense bitterness instantly expanded in my mouth.

"...So bitter."

I gave my thoughts honestly, immediately prompting a surprised look on Firill.

"Eh? I heard it tastes better a bit charred, so I fried one side thoroughly..."

"You fried it for too long. Look, the inside has turned black, hasn't it?"

I pointed at the remainder of the tamagoyaki on Firill's plate. Since the charred side was rolled on the inside, it looked normal at first glance, but the burnt portion could be seen from the cross-section.

"Cooking is so deep... Ah, it's bitter."

Firill tried a bite herself and made a bitter look.

Thus, the first cooking practice concluded with many lingering issues.

The only saving grace was that the plain rice and grilled fish were successfully prepared, but that was only because they were Mitsuki and Ariella's responsibility.

If assigned to Iris or the others, failures might very well have resulted.

—Next time during practice, I'll need to watch everyone carefully.

After forcing myself to finish the sweet miso soup and bitter tamagoyaki, I secretly vowed to myself.

"Looks like we all need to practice cooking more, me included."

After school, Lisa remarked while preparing a report on today's activities. A band-aid was wrapped around her fingertip—She had cut herself when chopping ingredients.

"Yeah, because we're low on manpower... If possible, I hope everyone can get familiar with every job."

While feeling conscious of Lisa's warmth from our shoulder contact, I nodded in agreement.

Putting our desks together, we were working side by side with our shoulders touching.

The only people staying behind in the classroom were Lisa and I as members of the festival executive committee.

With a low student population to begin with, the school became silent as soon as lessons were over, hence writing with a pen sounded especially loud.

"...But by the way, leaning so close together does make it difficult to write."

Lisa remarked, feeling cramped.

Due to being so close together, we had bumped into each other's arm several times already.

"In that case, shouldn't we separate a bit?"

"No. To prevent us from forgetting the feeling during special training the other day, we must keep a proper distance as lovers as much possible when we are alone."

Despite blushing mildly, Lisa refused to separate.

"It's a bit late by now for me to ask, but you don't dislike this?"

I tried to ask her a question that had also occurred to me during the special training.

"Dislike what?"

"Well, I was thinking... even if it's for delaying engagement matters, isn't it quite an ordeal if you have to pretend to be a couple with a guy you don't like?"

Perhaps I was not being clear enough, so I explained further.

"Y-You have no need to worry about that sort of thing. I do this for myself."

"But... Sure, if it's just for a day, but we're going to keep doing this until the school festival, right? If you're forcing yourself, you definitely won't make it to the end."

The school festival workload was only going to increase, but adding mental stress unnecessarily for the sake of lovers training made me worry if it was a bad idea.

"No—I am not forcing myself."

However, Lisa was answering with a displeased expression.

"Really?"

"Really! There are many things I wish to th-thank you for... I also believe that you are not without aspects worthy of respect, so I don't d-dislike you."

Lisa stared at her paperwork while speaking.

"Huh? You mean—"

"Ah! D-Don't get the wrong idea, okay? I am simply saying that I don't dislike you, which doesn't mean I like you!"

Blushing intensely, Lisa waved her hands and added a clarification.

"I-I get it."

"Hoo, goodness gracious... Now isn't the time for you to be worrying about others, is it? Please prioritize your own memories."

Lisa sighed in exasperation and stopped what she was doing.

Then putting her paperwork on the side, she took out her portable terminal from her bag.

"—Just as I mentioned the day before yesterday, I researched Yggdrasil as much as possible. Including unconfirmed reports, I've picked out all the information that intrigues me."

"Now that you mention it, you said to start with investigating Yggdrasil. Oh... I originally planned to look things up, but totally forgot."

Realizing how forgetful and careless I was, I could not help but scratch my head.

Why would I neglect something so important?

"Could you at least show some crisis awareness for your own affairs? Whatever, even if you investigated, I expect nothing more than what was taught in class."

Lisa seemed like she had not expected anything from me to begin with. Shrugging, she called up Yggdrasil's information on the screen.

First to be seen was a photo of a gigantic, strangely shaped tree.

"This is a picture of Yggdrasil?"

I confirmed with Lisa.

"Yes, this the clearest of all recent photographs. Just as you can see, Yggdrasil resembles a tree in appearance, but unlike ordinary plants, it can move on root-like feet. Growing approximate twenty meters a year, its height currently approaches 500 meters."

Lisa nodded affirmatively the started explaining.

"It initially appeared in a Norwegian mountain range then moved south slowly. Currently, it has stopped on the border between Denmark and Germany. Furthermore, Yggdrasil was designated a dragon twenty years ago, but some say that it actually appeared not long after Vritra went missing. However, since there are no concrete records, the veracity of this is open to question."

"Not long after Vritra went missing... Meaning before the birth of the Ds, right? This is my first time to hear this."

I answered in surprise.

"Disregarding whether the report is real or not, there is no question that someone has proposed that idea. Back then, there were apparently rumors among the locals about a gigantic tree that suddenly appeared. Reportedly, it never moved until Leviathan and other dragons started to become active, which is probably why it wasn't designated a dragon until later."

"If that report is real—It means that Yggdrasil must be driven by different motives compared to the other dragons after all."

Vritra had appeared twenty-five years ago. Afterwards, Ds began to be born among humans and as though in response, the dragons made their appearance... Judging by this sequence, the explanation, that the dragons awakened in search of Ds as mates, would hold.

But if Yggdrasil had appeared before the birth of Ds, then very naturally, one would conclude that its goal was not to find a D for a mate.

"According to what you said, Yggdrasil seeks the extermination of all other dragons, right?"

"Yeah, that's definitely what Yggdrasil said."

"If that were to be the case, the report on the timing of its appearance becomes slightly more believable. However, this is merely unconfirmed intel, hence making deductions on such a foundation is very risky. For now, please listen to the other information I have researched."

Lisa switched screens to show the next page.

"Three large-scale attacks have been launched at Yggdrasil to date. On every occasion, they failed due to *weapons malfunctioning*."

"Weapons malfunctioning? Not attacks having no effect or getting defended against?"

"Indeed. According to reports, all tanks and aircraft entering Yggdrasil's range would behave abnormally without exception. Even missiles launched from a distance would fly off in the wrong direction."

After listening to Lisa's explanation, I crossed my arms and pondered.

"If it's electronics going haywire, I think the reason might be a strong magnetic field..."

"Indeed, a strong magnetic field was apparently measured in Yggdrasil's vicinity. However, what acted erratically was not only computer-controlled weapons but everything powered by electricity."

"Electricity..."

Hearing this, I was reminded of something.

I was reminded of the data transmitted to me from Yggdrasil. In other words, that data was also—

"The following is my hypothesis. Perhaps Yggdrasil might possess a power related to electricity. The weapons data you've said to have received so far, and what is known as information recorded in the brain, are in other words, *electric signals*."

It looked like Lisa had thought of the same thing as me.

"Yeah, I think that's very likely."

I nodded and agreed with Lisa. Immediately, she looked at me worriedly.

"May I... confirm something with you?"

"What is it?"

"Are you always connected to Yggdrasil?"

Lisa asked me cautiously. I could read from her eyes slight nervousness and wariness.

"No. If I call to it in my mind, Yggdrasil reacts, but it's only when receiving data that I feel there's a connection."

"Reacting when you call huh? In that case, it means that you might be under surveillance. But if you are not always connected to Yggdrasil... It's a relief for now."

Lisa breathed a sigh of relief but I did not understand what she was worried about.

"If I'm always connected to Yggdrasil, will something bad happen?"

"Certainly. Suppose it keeps sending electric signals to you persistently—In the worst-case scenario, Yggdrasil might seize control of your body. Please don't summon Yggdrasil lightly from now on."

"I-I got it."

Confronted with a possibility that never occurred to me, I nodded to promise her.

But regarding the transmission of information, I was always able to terminate it by my own will, so it seemed to me that Lisa was being paranoid.

During the first deal, Yggdrasil had sought my consent too. In other words, Yggdrasil did not have any coercive power to ignore my will when transmitting information.

"—Please be careful, okay? In any case, this is the information I have gathered this time. From now on, I will search for ways to recover your

memories while working on the assumption that you are under Yggdrasil's electrical interference."

"Great, thank you, Lisa. I will put some serious thought into it too."

Hearing me say that, Lisa glared at me.

"Being motivated is very good and all, but since we have no idea whether Yggdrasil is friend or foe, we will leave direct negotiations as the last resort. Please do not take matters into your own hand."

"...Understood."

Reminded by Lisa, I nodded.

But thinking in hindsight, perhaps we should not have left it as a last resort for later.

Because two weeks later—"Green" Yggdrasil would *vanish* off the face of the Earth.

Chapter 3 - The Disappeared Green Dragon

Part 1

"—What spectacular scenery."

Kili Surtr Muspelheim looked out to the *epicenter of the blast* and remarked.

This was farmland on the border of Germany and Denmark that had been abandoned due to Yggdrasil's arrival. Right now, there was *absolutely nothing*.

Whether abandoned farmland, broken sections of road, or even the dragon in the shape of giant tree, nothing existed.

Everything had vanished without trace, leaving a gigantic crater several kilometers wide. A hemisphere had been gouged cleanly out of the ground to serve as evidence for a powerful explosion.

"What on earth..."

Jeanne Hortensia was murmuring in a daze next to Kili. Together with Kili, she was looking down from a slight hill, staring at the crater in the distance.

"Who knows. Without witness the moment, all we can know is that this resulted from Hekatonkheir making contact with Yggdrasil."

Looking at this scene which seemed as though part of the world had been dug out, Kili replied.

"NIFL should have recorded what happened. If we infiltrate a base again, perhaps we might be about to get details—Are we doing it?"

"Oh my, Jeanne-chan, that's so proactive of you, how rare. But there's no need, because what's important is the outcome, not the process."

The wind blowing from crater was causing her hair to fly up. Kili narrowed her eyes and answered.

"Outcome?"

Hearing Jeanne's question, Kili nodded with a stiff expression.

"Yes, whether Yggdrasil was truly destroyed—This is the only question of importance."

Part 2

Ever since preparations for the school festival started, two weeks had passed.

Through continued practice, everyone's cooking skills were improving bit by bit. The "fake couple" interactions between me and Lisa were gradually getting more natural than before.

The ordered supplies had also arrived at last, so Brynhildr Class started making costumes in our homeroom classroom.

"...It's almost like cutting paper."

Cutting folded fabric with scissors, I muttered.

Although I was following pre-made templates and instructions, I still found it hard to imagine the full look of the finished garment.

But once the cut cloth was spread out, the garment had definitely taken form. It felt like mischievous fox spirits were playing pranks on me.

"Feels unbelievable, doesn't it? That's why I love making clothes."

Sewing sleeves next to me, Firill stopped what she was doing and remarked.

"Yeah, I've discovered it's unexpectedly fun after doing it for real. But by the way, I never knew you had tailoring skills, Firill."

I originally thought she would not have any tailoring experience just like with cooking, but Firill joined Mitsuki in directing the making of costumes.

"I learned about cosplay culture from the books and manga I read... Hence, I tried making some and ended up getting obsessed."

Firill replied quietly with some embarrassment.

"Really? Then you have a lot of clothes in your room that you made yourself?"

"Yes... but I've kept it a secret from everyone so far, because none of them have met my standards. However—If you're interested, I could wear them to show you?"

Firill leaned near me and whispered in my ear.

"Huh?"

Just as Firill's breath and words were making me waver, she said with a slight blush:

"Many cosplay outfits are quite sexy... So be prepared for your adrenaline to pump, Mononobe-kun."

"Uh... S-Stop joking around with me."

I imagined Firill in a revealing costume but halfway through, I frantically shook my head.

"I'm serious, not joking."

Firill leaned in closer.

But seeing our interactions, Lisa scolded us with displeasure.

"Hey, you two over there, cut the idle chatter and get back to work."

"Eh? Don't tell me you're jealous, Lisa?"

"O-Of course not!"

Lisa went red in the face and denied Firill's observation.

"Hmm... It feels so suspicious. Lately, Lisa, you've gotten unusually close with Mononobe-kun."

"Nothing of that... sort."

Lisa looked away while answer. Feeling embarrassed too, I scratched my face.

Most likely, the results of our lovers training were showing up, but it was quite embarrassing for a classmate to point it out.

"Hmmmmm... Are you two hiding something from me?"

"No, that's—"

Essentially, we intended to reveal Lisa's request just before the event and ask for everyone's assistance. But if we told them this early, we would have to suffer teasing for the next two weeks for sure.

If possible, I wanted to delay announcing this. Just as I was thinking of an excuse, news arrived.

The door was forcefully flung open, drawing everyone's gaze.

"Urgent announcement."

Shinomiya-sensei appeared. Looking at all of us with a stiff expression, she spoke the shocking truth.

"We just received a report from NIFL. Yggdrasil and Hekatonkheir—apparently disappeared."

"—Let me start with what transpired. After resurrecting, Hekatonkheir made its way towards Yggdrasil. This was confirmed quite some time ago already. But for the past twenty-years, Hekatonkheir has never made contact with other dragon, hence, the majority opinion was that it would change direction eventually."

Shinomiya-sensei entered the classroom, went up to the lectern and started to explain.

We paused in our dressmaking for now and returned to our seats, listening intently to how the two dragons vanished.

"But that prediction was off. Hekatonkheir approached Yggdrasil. Deciding this was an anomalous situation, NIFL observed the two dragons."

Everyone listened to the teacher with serious expressions on their faces.

But my mind was in a partial state of panic. Cold sweat slid down my forehead.

To me, Yggdrasil was not simply a dragon. As things stood at the moment, it was cooperating with me. And on the matter of recovering my memories, it was the last resort I would consider relying on.

Getting a premonition that an irrevocable situation had occurred, I felt intense anxiety as a result.

"Mononobe..."

Noticing my anxiety from her seat on my left, Iris looked worriedly at me.

I forced a smile to tell her "I'm fine" and focused on Shinomiya-sensei's explanations.

"Then an hour ago, Yggdrasil started to attack when Hekatonkheir reportedly reached within two kilometers or so."

"Attack!? A fight between dragons!?"

Lisa cried out in surprise.

It was only a natural reaction. A fight between dragons—There was no precedent at all.

"Yes. Perhaps it was an act of interception against an invader of its territory, but in response to the attack, Hekatonkheir began to fight as well. Despite getting skewered by Yggdrasil's branches and roots, Hekatonkheir still continued to advance. Releasing a blinding flash of light, it caused a massive explosion."

"Meaning that Hekatonkheir detonated itself in a suicide attack of mutual annihilation?"

Mitsuki asked Shinomiya-sensei in a hoarse voice.

"That appears to be the case based on NIFL's observations, but what actually happened is still unclear. However, as results stand, both Yggdrasil and Hekatonkheir vanished together. This is the truth."

Hearing the teacher's answer, Mitsuki's face went stiff.

"Considering past precedents, Hekatonkheir should not be regarded as destroyed...."

"Indeed, we cannot reject the possibility that Hekatonkheir will reappear eventually. But so far, there are no reports of its revival. In other words, perhaps it is only a temporary situation, but for the time being, there are no dragons on Earth to threaten us."

Everyone gasped, then whispers started up in the classroom.

Two dragons disappeared, "Black Vtrita" missing—

Just as Shinomiya-sensei said, there were no dragons existing anywhere on the Earth to threaten us.

"Although we cannot lower our guard, this incident should be considered advantageous to us. If anything changes, I will inform you, so go back to your school festival preparations."

After finishing, Shinomiya-sensei left the classroom in a rush. She was probably very busy due to the incident.

"Nii-san, I will go out for a short while too."

Mitsuki left as though chasing after Shinomiya-sensei. As the captain of the Counter-Dragon Squad, she probably wanted to get more details on the situation.

"Sure... I got it."

I answered absentmindedly but in her rush, Mitsuki ran out of the classroom without noticing that something was off with me.

—Could this situation really be considered advantageous?

I looked up at the ceiling in the classroom and wondered.

If Yggdrasil was humanity's enemy like the other dragons, it was definitely advantageous. But if it was standing on humanity's side, this would be a severe loss.

If the missing Vritra were to show up again, putting us in a desperate crisis, I would not be able to rely on Yggdrasils power to obtain data on new weapons.

Although this problem was also related to my memories, I intended to shelve the matter of my memories for now. I could not honestly feel happy about the current developments.

After school, Lisa and I were staying in the classroom as members of the festival executive committee as usual. Today, there was the additional presence of Iris as well.

"Speaking of which, Iris-san, you know about his matter too, right?"

Seeing Iris with a serious expression, Lisa spoke as though it had just occurred to her.

"Yes, so when I heard that Yggdrasil vanished... I felt very worried. Mononobe, are you okay?"

Iris stared at my face and asked me.

"I haven't experienced any changes at all. Even when something so drastic happened to Yggdrasil, I didn't notice anything."

To put Iris at ease, I smiled to her and told her I had no symptoms.

Immediately, it was Lisa's turn to question me.

"Did you try to summon Yggdrasil?"

"No, not yet, because you asked me not to summon it on my own, so I thought I'd discuss with you first, Lisa."

"A wise decision. However, I believe we need to confirm Yggdrasil's continued existence even if it means bearing some risk right now. I permit you to do it. Try summoning it."

"Got it."

I nodded and called to Yggdrasil in my mind.

—Yggdrasil, are you listening? Answer me if you are.

But even after waiting a long time, no voice responded.

"...Doesn't seem to be working."

I shook my head and Lisa murmured with her arms crossed.

"Then should we regard it as destroyed...? If that were the case, then it proves that defeating Yggdrasil will not recover your memories."

"How can this be—then Mononobe will never recall his precious memories again?"

Iris spoke, almost looking like she was about to burst into tears.

"I didn't say that. Although it's true that options have been reduced, I will find a solution. Iris-san, leave his matter to me and focus your efforts on preparing for the school festival."

Hearing Lisa's assertion, Iris showed relief on her face.

"Okay... I got, but Lisa-chan—"

Iris paused here and stared at Lisa squarely.

"I can't think of a way to recover his memories, so I have to rely on you, Lisa-chan—But I'll support Mononobe all the way!"

"Huh...?"

Pressured by Iris' forceful gaze, Lisa backed away slightly.

"I'm the one that Mononobe entrusted his memories to, so I can't leave everything to you, Lisa-chan. I'll try to do what's in my power."

Iris smiled sweetly, took her school bag and walked to the classroom door.

"Whether it's about Mononobe or the school festival, let's do our best! See you tomorrow!"

"G-Goodbye."

Iris waved goodbye while Lisa answered in a slightly higher pitch. I said "bye" to her and waved.

Only after Iris disappeared from sight did Lisa exhale deeply.

"She... seems to have changed."

"Did she?

I tilted my head. Iris did not seem to have changed in particular.

"She did. Until recently, she was gave off an air of unreliability and unsteadiness. But now, I can feel strong willpower coming from her."

"Strong willpower..."

Perhaps I was the one who forced Iris to change in this way. I could not help but feel guilty.

Staring at me, Lisa seemed to be observing my attitude. Then hesitantly, she said:

"Excuse me... By any chance, are you and Iris-san—"

But Lisa halted mid-sentence and felll silent.

"Are we what?"

Not understanding what was up with her, I urged her to continue.

"No—I'd better not pursue the matter unnecessarily, because I... am not your real girlfriend."

Lisa's answer sounded like she was trying to persuade herself. Then she smiled somewhat forcibly.

"Very well, let us get to work. We will begin with writing today's activity report."

Next, when sat in our seats with our shoulders touching, taking care of our jobs as executive committee members.

Before I knew it, Lisa's body warmth from the side had already become something I took for granted. Her warmth was gradually calming down my anxious emotions from the sudden incident.

Part 3

"Then let us begin the third Ether Wind experiment."

The voice of the lab coat wearing Principal Charlotte B. Lord was heard in the special underground training site below the school.

"Yes."

I answered briefly and raised my left hand.

—Fictional armament, Siegfried.

I raised the ornamental gun made of dark matter and aimed at the target—

"Principal."

"What's the matter?"

"Isn't this scene too surreal?"

Looking at the giant frozen tuna on the target location, I asked her.

"...Shut up, I'm holding in my laughter too."

Shoulders and voice shaking, the principal replied.

"Hey, you're already laughing out! Since you find it hilarious too, prepare something more normal, okay...?"

"This can't be helped, because preparing a cadaver is quite difficult."

The principal shrugged and replied.

"At least it's not processed food, so it's much better than last time..."

After defeating Hraesvelgr, I had gained a new ability—the generation of "Ether Wind."

Four days had passed since the report that Yggdrasil and Hekatonkheir had disappeared. Today, it was the third experiment to test and analyze Ether Wind.

Ever since it was confirmed that I had inherited Hraesvelgr's ability, two experiments had already taken place in the intervening two weeks.

But there was never a satisfactory result each time, because of the special properties of Ether Wind.

"If the golden particles you create through transmutation has the same properties as Hraesvelgr's power, it might be a medium for souls to manifest. Since it's impossible to test this effect without the presence of souls, I prepared the largest dead body I could find so far. Be grateful."

Pointing at the frozen tuna, the principal puffed out her chest and declared.

Last time, we were using processed meat borrowed from the catering building, but nothing happened. Hence, this time, we were using a frozen tuna that had not been processed yet.

There was nothing wrong with this approach, but even though it was not wrong...

"Why a tuna..."

"I understand how you feel. But importing human cadavers might cause unnecessary speculation among the outside world, so I decided to use tuna with its relatively large body size."

"In a case like this, wouldn't the size of the brain matter more for selection?"

"Don't be like that. As an international organization, Midgard is under many ethical constraints. We will face protests on many fronts if we used sapient creatures. Also, if we use tuna, we'll be able to have a feast after the experiment, don't you agree?"

Seeing the principal licking her lips while she spoke, I slumped my shoulders powerlessly.

"Now those are your true thoughts..."

"Fufu, it's just a small reward. Come, hurry and start the experiment."

"—Understood."

I sighed and raised Siegfried again.

Then focusing my mind, I imagined Hraesvelgr's power.

"Ether Bullet."

Turning the picture in my mind into a bullet, I pulled the trigger.

The fired bullet of dark matter turned into golden particles and covered the frozen tuna.

If the tuna's soul manifested, it would surely be a bizarre scene. While thinking that, I observed the experiment's reaction.

However, nothing happened. The golden light faded and disappeared.

"No good this time either...? Perhaps we need to use a subject with higher intelligence."

The principal remarked ruefully.

"—Is that it for today's experiment?"

I put down Siegfried and asked but the principal shook her had.

"No, there's something else for you to test. Maika, get into position!"

The principal shouted and the door to the training site instantly opened. Maika-san appeared in her maid outfit.

She strode over to the frozen tuna and stopped.

"This time, fire at Maika."

"—Huh?

I stared into the principal's eyes and wondered if she was serious.

"I heard that during your battles against Hraesvelgr, there was one instance when you were enveloped in golden particles and unable to move. This experiment will test if that phenomenon can be replicated."

"But suddenly experimenting on a human will be dangerous..."

"Don't worry. Maika is very strong."

I was worried about Maika-san but the principal asserted with inexplicable confidence.

"I will be fine. Please do not hold back."

Maika-san herself was urging me with a smile.

Despite clearly chosen as a test subject, she did not look nervous at all. She was abnormally bold.

"...I got it."

Despite my uneasiness, I aimed Siegfried's muzzle at Maika-san.

Since I absolutely must not transmute it into any other substance, I strongly maintained the picture in my mind and pulled the trigger.

The fired bullet turned into golden particles and covered Maika-san's body.

"How is it, Maika?"

The principal called to her but she did not reply. Maika-san's smile seemed frozen on her face.

"—I'm guessing she's unable to speak. Because when we were hit by Hraesvelgr's move, we couldn't make a sound either."

I told the principal while observing Maika-san's condition.

After a while, the particles faded and Maika-san immediately blinked.

"Oh, I can move now."

Maika-san opened and closed her hand repeatedly while reporting to the principal.

"Yes, the phenomenon during the battle against Hraesvelgr was successfully replicated. Although we have failed to confirm the power to manifest souls, this has raised chances that your power is of the same nature as Hraesvelgr's."

The principal nodded contentedly, patted me on the back and said "Good work."

"What remains is quite a significant factor of uncertainty. Indeed, Basilisk's power still remains unknown..."

Holding her hand against the side of her mouth, she murmured. Having ended the experiment, Maika-san approached and replied to the principal.

"Yes. Using the school festival as a pretext, we conducted a health examination but no changes were diagnosed among the students' dragon marks."

"No visible changes in appearance. That means that the person might not even notice herself. What exactly should we do...?"

"Charlotte-sama, for example..."

Seeing the principal and Maika-san begin a discussion, I asked them apprehensively:

"Umm... The experiment has really ended, right? Since I still need to prepare for the school festival, can I leave?"

"Hmm? Oh, sorry, you must be busy too. But hold on, I've got something else to tell you."

The principal halted her conversation with Maika-san and turned to me.

"Something else?"

Seeing the principal grin maliciously, I had a bad feeling and asked her.

"As Midgard's principal, I have a favor to ask of you. You know that the school festival is held over two days, right?"

"Yeah, I know..."

"The reason for having two days is to differentiate visitors. People with intimate ties to Midgard, privy to undisclosed secrets, versus the other group who are not. These two groups cannot mix."

"That definitely make sense. But what does that have to do with me?"

So there was that kind of reason behind it. As much as I could understand, it was an issue on the organizer's side. I did not think it had anything to do with me as an ordinary student.

However, the principal shrugged in exasperation and sighed in an exaggerated manner.

"It has a lot to do with you. Have you forgotten how special you are? You are the only one verified case of a male D. This has not been disclosed to the public yet and it is unknown what chaos might result."

"Eh, really? But Firill's parents know about me..."

The next king of the Principality of Erlia—Firill's father apparently heard rumors of me. As a result, I originally thought that my existence was already known to the outside world to some extent.

"Firill Crest's parents, the royal family of the Principality of Erlia? Naturally, as major sponsors of Midgard, they must have heard rumors about you. But people who are only slightly involved with Midgard would never expect in their wildest dreams the existence of a male D, hence—"

The principal snapped her fingers. Immediately, Maika-san jogged over to go through the door then swiftly brought something back.

"We will concentrate all the people who don't know about you on the first day's invitations. When the time comes, I want you to wear this."

The principal motioned to Maika-san with her eyes. Instantly, Maika-san handed to me what she had brought.

"The Academy's uniform...? Hey, isn't this a girl's!?"

Seeing the uniform I received, I could not help but scream.

"Yes, it should fit you well because it was made according to measurements the other day."

"That's not the issue here, why do I have to wear a female uniform—"

So that was why Maika-san was measuring me with a tape the other day? While thinking that, I tried to protest but the principal interrupted me in a forceful tone of voice.

"Of course it is for you to disguise yourself as a female student. Although I considered putting you on house arrest for one day, I'd feel sorry for you."

"E-Even if that's the case..."

Looking at the female uniform, I did not know what to do.

Immediately, Maika-san dropped a long-haired wig on the uniform with a smile.

"Don't worry, Mononobe-san, you have a cute face. You won't be exposed as long as you pay attention to your voice and manner of walking."

Receiving such encouragement that I could not feel happy about, I slumped my shoulders in dejection.

Seeing me disheartened, the principal patted me on the back and laughed.

"I will issue orders to the entire student body beforehand to keep the truth of your gender a secret. So relax and enjoy the school festival."

So all the students will know I'm crossdressing huh?

Feeling even more depressed, I sighed.

To be honest, being confined in a room would feel much better, but as a member of the festival executive committee, I must not take a break. I was cornered.

"Principal, let me ask while I'm here. Which days will my parents and Lisa Highwalker's be visiting?"

But this was a matter I must confirm in advance no matter what, so I asked the principal.

"The Highwalker Group is one of Midgard's sponsors and their position allows them to know about you, so they will be invited to the second day. However, your parents will be on the first day. Even if they know you are at Midgard, they are still ordinary people in position. I cannot allow them to mix with the second day's visitors."

"I see..."

If I was allowed to show myself as a man on the second day, I should be able to play the part of Lisa's boyfriend.

But on the first day, I must crossdress in front of my own parents. That would be almost the same as torture.

No... But this could be my excuse to avoid my parents, right?

To prevent my memory loss from coming to light, I must avoid contact with my parents as much as possible. And to achieve this goal, I could apparently take advantage of the current situation.

"Then do your best to prepare for the school festival. Right now, there are no dragons targeting you lot. Enjoy the festivities as much as you can."

Laughing jovially, the principal's shoulders shook.

But after hearing her say that, my uplifted feelings cooled down a bit.

"...Principal, do you believe that all dragons have disappeared?"

I was interested in her opinion as Midgard's chief administrator, so I asked.

"Hmm, all dragon eh—"

Immediately, the principal smiled wryly for some reason then said:

"I cannot assert there are no more dragons."

"Perhaps Hekatonkheir will revive, or Vritra might reappear..."

I agreed but the principal shook her head.

"That's not what I mean. What I'm implying is there might be other undiscovered dragons hidden in the world."

"What—"

Hearing this unexpected answer, I could not help but gasp.

"What's to be so surprised about? This shouldn't be anything impossible to conceive. Besides, what the things we call dragons? You can't understand that either."

"R-Right. Now that you mention it... The ones who decided on the name dragon and described these things as monsters from legends was Midgard's

superior—Asgard. If you're part of the higher-ups, Principal, do you know the truth about dragons?"

Hearing her say that, I asked in return. It was something that had intrigued me since a long time ago.

"—You overestimate me. No one knows about those monsters. At most, there is a hypothesis founded on speculation."

"Hypothesis..."

"Basically, a theory that no one knows is right or wrong. And the person who proposed it is no longer around, how irresponsible..."

The principal sounded like she was grumbling. Her face seemed especially sad.

"Can you tell me that hypothesis?"

"Unfortunately, it is top secret, not something you're allowed to know."

"Yeah... I thought so."

Information held only by the higher-ups could not possibly be told to an ordinary student like me.

Because I asked without raising my hopes, I gave up after knowing it was not possible.

But seeing me like that, the principal seemed to show embarrassment on her face. Hesitantly, she said:

"No, it's not like that. Personally, I think you can be told... But umm, rules..."

The principal glanced furtively at Maika-san while speaking to me.

"Charlotte-sama, please don't, okay?"

Maika-san warned the principal while smiling courteously. The principal motioned towards her with her eyes and smiled wryly.

"...So that's that. But personally, I really wish you could stand among those who ought to be in the know."

"Those who ought to be in the know?"

I found the principal's wording quite curious and cocked my head in puzzlement.

"Meaning that—whether you can become my friend in the truest sense of the word. I mentioned on our first encounter, right? I want a friend."

Speaking of which, the principal apparently said something like that to me... But I could not remember clearly.

"How can I become your friend, Principal?"

"Hmm, welll... First we have to sneak into the girls dorm together—"

The principal made an excited look then started speaking but halfway through, Maika-san grabbed her by the head.

"Owwwwwwwwww!? M-Maika, my head's gonna split open!"

"Charlotte-sama, the joke ends here. Mononobe-san, please do not take her seriously and do anything weird. It was all a joke."

Seeing her intimidating smile, I nodded reflexively.

Then the principal was taken away by Maika-san, held by the head, thus ending the experiment.

I looked at the female uniform and wig in my hands and could not help but sigh deeply.

I was curious about what the principal had said but more importantly right now, perhaps I should think about how I was going to survive the first day of the school festival.

Part 4

Busy times flew by within the blink of an eye.

The festival executive committee was not only in charge of directing their homerooms but also mobilizing manpower to help the school festival's overall

preparations. The continuous flow of jobs gave me little time to catch my breath.

Thus, the school festival's first day came at last, my time of trial and tribulation.

"Fu, fufu... N-Nii-san... You are so adorable."

Seeing me look like a completely different person, Mitsuki clutched her sides with laughter. It was rare to see Mitsuki laugh so unreservedly. I seemed to have stimulated endless laughter in her.

"—Sorry, but even if you all me adorable, I don't feel happy at all."

Dressed in a female uniform with a wig, I replied with a scowl.

The skirt was too breezy, making me feel very uneasy. To think that girls could tolerate wearing such insecure outfits, I was thoroughly impressed from the bottom of my heart.

"B-But... it looks way better than I would have expected. If it is like this, the various visitors probably will not realize you are a boy, Nii-san."

Mitsuki examined me from head to foot again then promised me "No problem."

Having mustered my resolve, I had put on the female uniform. To check the look, I visited Mitsuki at her room. It seemed like there was nothing amiss.

Even so, I still did not feel entirely reassured, but with this, I could take part in the school festival at least.

"Fufu, I will have to call you Nee-san today."

"I beg you, please don't call me that."

Mitsuki said with delight but I objected seriously.

"But I believe it would not work unless I change the way I address you..."

"Normally, you can just call people by name. There's nothing unnatural about 'Yuu' as a girl's name."

"Eh—c-call you by name?"

Hearing my suggestion, Mitsuki went red in a fluster.

"This suggestion should work, right?"

"True, I suppose... But no way! I cannot do it!"

Mitsuki shook her head as hard as she could and refused.

"W-Why?"

"In any case, I still cannot do it now! Y-You are Nee-san for today! It is decided!"

Having declared that, Mitsuki expelled me from her room. Slam, the door closed.

"If you can't do it now... When else?"

Left in the hallway, I cocked my head in puzzlement, dressed in a female uniform.

Was it because of my missing memories that I could not understand Mitsuki's thoughts—or was I simply dense? Right now, I could not tell.

"Wow! Mononobe turned into a girl!"

"Yuu is wearing the same clothes as everyone!"

Mitsuki and I arrived at school earlier than usual. What awaited me were reactions I was somewhat prepared for already.

Iris and Tia rushed over and examined my appearance closely.

"Yeah, it's very cute. For a moment, I didn't recognize Mononobe-kun."

"Mm."

Ariella and Ren looked at me with impressed eyes.

"Mononobe-kun, excellent. It makes me... want to marry you a bit."

Firill stared at me with inexplicable ecstasy.

"The appearance is acceptable. But so-called femininity is something that is expressed through subtle behavior. You would do best to pay attention to your walking posture and various gestures. Also, there is—"

Lisa approached while observing my female outfit then placed her hand on my chest.

"Given this rare chance, how about some breast pads? Someone small and petite like Mitsuki-chan could get away with a more modest chest without looking unnatural... But statuesque as you are, I believe you need to show more femininity."

However, when Lisa offered this advice, Mitsuki's face instantly froze.

Comparing her petite chest with Lisa's voluptuous bosom, Mitsuki smiled unnaturally.

"L-Lisa-san, there is no need to go to such lengths. Nii-san—no, Nee-san—is already very feminine. The size of one's chest does not affect a woman's charm."

"But having some is better than none—"

Mitsuki's face twitched in spasms.

"NOT. NEEDED!"

Mitsuki glared at Lisa and asserted.

"F-Fine..."

Intimidated by her forcefulness, even Lisa back down.

"Good grief—Now I shall confirm today's plans. Please sit wherever you wish, everyone."

Instructing everyone, Mitsuki stood up at the lectern.

The reason why she asked us to sit wherever we wanted was because our seats were no longer in the classroom.

The day before, we had moved all the desks and chairs out of the classroom, replacing them with three tables for customers to use. The interior was decorated into a "Japanese-like style" and felt completely different from the usual classroom atmosphere.

The ornamental Hinamatsuri dolls brought by Mitsuki were surrounded by a large number of Japanese fortune cats, a rather bizarre sight. As a side note, the fortune cats were brought by Ren who seemed to have a hobby of collecting them.

"The ones in charge of running the Japanese teahouse on the first day will be Iris-san, Ariella-san, Ren-san and Firill-san. The four of you, please change into your uniforms and prepare breakfast for all of us as warmup practice and for taste testing."

"Yes, I'll do my best!"

Iris answered Mitsuki energetically.

"The school festival starts at 9am. The initial shift will have Iris-san and Firill-san in charge of serving customers while Ariella-san and Ren-san will be responsible for the kitchen. However, when there are many customers, please leave only one person outside and have three of you cooking. If things are still tight, the remaining members will join in to assist."

Mitsuki explained fluently. She looked no different from when she was commanding anti-dragon battles. Perhaps due to that, everyone's face naturally tensed up.

"In the afternoon, please allow each person to take half an hour break each depending on customer volume. During that time, please have one person in charge of the outside and two in the kitchen. Then let us begin!"

Following Mitsuki's orders, Iris, Firill, Ariella and Ren, on duty today, exited the classroom.

This was because the cooking and changing areas were located in the unused classroom next door.

Left in the classroom were me, Mitsuki, Lisa and Tia, the four of us.

We sat down around a round table and waited for the food to be done.

"—Nee-san, let us head to the pier to pick up Father and Mother after breakfast."

Mitsuki examined the table's cleanliness with her finger while speaking. While feeling this title of "Nee-san" nagging at my heart, I observed Mitsuki's face.

Mitsuki looked like she believed I would matter-of-factly go with her. But if possible, I did not want to meet our parents.

"Sorry, but can I ask you to pick them up on your own? Look... at the way I'm dressed."

"Not an issue. I already informed them of the crossdressing."

"No, it's embarrassing even if they know. I'll go say hi to them afterwards, so give me some time for mental preparation."

I wanted to minimize contact with the parents as much as possible, but Mitsuki looked displeased.

"Say hi... Why do you sound so detached? Nii-san, you never called home even once, did you? Father and Mother are extremely worried about you. Please consider their feelings!"

Crap, Mitsuki was angry for real.

Indeed, my attitude would seem heartless and ungrateful to others.

But right now, I was not the "Mononobe Yuu" whom they knew.

"Mitsuki-san, my apologies, but he promised me already."

While I was hesitating how to answer, Lisa interjected.

"Huh?"

Mitsuki looked at Lisa in surprise. I was also wondering "Did I promise something like that?" and looked at her doubtfully.

"In our discussions, we decided to immediately scout the other homerooms as soon as the school festival starts. Because there are other homerooms opening cafes like us, which could be used for reference. Am I right?"

Lisa sought my agreement while winking at me. I realized she was secretly helping me.

"Y-Yeah, that's right. I promised Lisa already."

I frantically agreed and Lisa turned to face Mitsuki again.

"—And that is the case. Since this is part of the executive committee's job, I asked him to accompany me."

"Tia wants to go along!"

Then Tia raised her hand.

"Sure, no problem, Tia-san, you will come with us to check out the school festival."

Seeing things gradually decided, Mitsuki slumped her shoulders in resignation.

"No helping it... I understand. But conversely, after you finish scouting, you must go meet Father and Mother."

Mitsuki glared at me with some linger displeasure.

"Got it—I promise you."

After all, I still had to meet them once no matter what. Mitsuki would never allow anything else. Also, running from them the entire day would be unnatural.

"You must, okay?"

Perhaps my attitude did not inspire trust in her, Mitsuki kept reminding me repeatedly.

Thus, after some time, the classroom door opened. Dressed in kimonos, Iris and the others entered. They were coming over with trays carrying breakfast. Then they placed the food on the table.

"Mononobe, thanks for waiting! It'll definitely be tasty today for sure!"

Saying that, Iris placed the miso soup in front of me.

"Yeah, it seems very tasty. Also... Your outfit is very well-made. As expected of something you made yourself, Iris, it's very much in your style."

Smelling the miso soup's aroma, filled with anticipation, I admired Iris' kimono look.

She was wearing a kimono patterned with many small white flowers. Iris' airs matched the kimono's design very well, producing a sense of attractiveness different from usual.

"Oh, you even put on that hair accessory."

Seeing the butterfly hairpin I had given to her as a gift, I felt quite happy.

"Ehehe... I decided to put it away carefully for most of the time to avoid getting it dirty, and only wear it on special days."

Iris smiled shyly then served miso soup to the others.

Next came Firill with plates of tamagoyaki.

"This tamagoyaki is the best I've made to date. Mononobe-kun, you must savor it carefully."

Firill divided up the beautifully shaped tamagoyaki between everyone. Just as I could see, there was no charring on the inside.

"Got it. Also, Firill, your kimono looks great."

Firill's kimono had an abstract snowflake-like pattern which matched well with the kimono's background of light blue which resembled the winter sky.

"...That's it for your comment?"

However, Firill sounded slightly dissatisfied. While serving the others, she deliberately pushed her bosom against me.

"H-Hey?"

The soft sensation on my shoulder, transmitted through the kimono, was making me flustered. However, Firill did not leave me and whispered in my ear.

"Mononobe-kun, did you notice anything different?"

"Notice what... D-Don't tell me... you're not wearing any?"

The softness from her bosom felt especially vivid. I asked hoarsely.

"Yes, today—I'm not wearing a bra."

Firill smiled mischievously then separated from me, puffing out her magnificent chest.

"But I did use a supporter. Wearing a bra would ruin a kimono's beautiful curves. If possible... I wish you could comment on this sort of invisible effort."

"N-Nothing less expected of you..."

Overwhelmed by her in many different senses, I expressed my amazement. Firill finally showed a contented look and left.

"Come, next is plain rice and grilled fish."

"Mm!"

Then Ariella and Ren brought the remaining food and breakfast had arrived completely.

Ariella was wearing a kimono with subdued colors and a pattern of bamboo grass. Ren's was a red kimono with floral patterns.

"You two look good in your kimonos too, but you seem a bit exhausted."

Looking at Ariella and Ren's faces up close, I noticed the fatigue on their faces.

"Because a few places in Ren's kimono was sewn wrong, I re-did the sewing yesterday, working until late night, so I'm a bit tired today."

Ariella smiled wryly and yawned slightly.

"Mm..."

Ren bowed her head apologetically.

She was what one would call a prodigy, giving an impression that she could finish anything perfectly and effortlessly but there were apparently things she was not good at.

"Then all the food has arrived. Let us hurry and try it out."

After confirming everyone was seated, Mitsuki issued orders.

"Thanks for the food."

"—Thanks for the food."

Everyone put clapped their hands together and began to eat.

The month-long training had paid off. The food prepared by Iris and the others was very delicious.

"Every step I take, I instantly feel conscious I'm wearing a skirt..."

After breakfast, I left the classroom with Lisa and Tia. With every step, I would look down at my swaying skirt. During the walk from the dorm to school, I had gone through quite an embarrassing experience, hence my resistance against crossdressing had already numbed somewhat. But the sense of dissonance generated by the clothing itself was impossible to erase no matter what.

"Yuu dislikes skirts? Tia loves them because they're cool and breezy."

Tia walked while holding hands with me and Lisa, asking me incredulously.

"Yeah, it's definitely cool and breezy... But it also feels like not wearing anything, it makes me uncomfortable."

After I gave this answer to Tia, it was Lisa's turn to speak:

"By the way, how did you take care of underwear? Don't tell me you're wearing Mitsuki-san's..."

"Of course not! I'm just wearing normal boxers!"

I frantically denied Lisa's suspicions.

"Hoo, very well. I am relieved to know that the person I will be introducing to my parents tomorrow is not that type of pervert."

Lisa chuckled and said.

"You..."

I glared at Lisa coldly.

"Lisa's papa and mama will come tomorrow?"

Tia asked Lisa.

"Yes, that is the plan."

"But Lisa will be working with us tomorrow. Even if your papa and mama come to school, you won't be able to take them around?"

Tia asked in worry.

Lisa made a troubled expression then answered ambiguously:

"That works better for me, because I will be free from unnecessary questioning..."

We still had not said anything about our pretending to be a couple. We intended to explain tomorrow morning and ask everyone to help.

"Oh... How strange. Neither Lisa nor Yuu wants to see their papa and mama, but if Tia was in your shoes... Tia will feel very happy."

Tia commented with a baffled look on her face.

"Ah..."

I recalled that Tia's parents were deceased and felt sorry for her.

It had probably puzzled Tia the whole time that I did not go to pick up my parents.

Even if I told her the truth, standing from Tia's perspective, she would probably think that my troubles were luxuries.

Lisa looked at me.

Since we had worked together for a month and kept practicing being a couple, I could tell from her gaze that she was asking me "What to do?"

However, I could not come up with a correct answer to tell Tia.

Whether apologizing or explaining, both would only cause Tia to disagree even more. Hence—

"Tia, let's go!"

Pulling Tia's hand, I walked quickly ahead.

"Y-Yuu?"

"Wait, what is with you suddenly?"

Holding hands with Tia, Lisa was dragged along and asked, feeling troubled.

"The visitors will be arriving soon and there will be flood of people. Before that, we should visit other homerooms' shops as much as possible. Let's have fun with us for the whole day, Tia."

"Oh... Okay!"

Tia nodded in agreement and smiled.

This way of doing things might be a bit stiff, but right now, the only way I could think off to make Tia happy was for her to devote herself to enjoying the school festival.

"It is fine that you want to enjoy the school festival, but please do not forget to gather information properly."

Lisa sighed and reminded. However, the corners of her mouth were smiling.

In this manner, we raced to the other homerooms.

Along the way, we passed by Shinomiya-sensei who warned us not to run in the hallways—

Midgard's Ds were all assigned to respective homerooms.

Apart from the most prominent Brynhildr Class where I belonged, there were Gerhilde Class, Helmwige Class, Schwertleite Class, Ortlinde Class, Siegrune Class, Waltraute Class and Rossweisse Class, a total of nine homerooms.

These homerooms seemed to be named after Norse valkyries. Although there was the exception of me, but Ds were essentially young maidens, hence naming them after valkyries carried the meaning of "girls who fight dragons."

Although there were extreme geniuses like Ren or people with extenuating circumstances like Tia, who were assigned as exceptions, girls were essentially assigned to homerooms according to age group.

In most cases, the ability to generate and use dark matter seemed to awaken roughly the same time as when secondary sex characteristics appeared. Many of the Ds' homerooms had students similar to Lisa and my age. Conversely, young Ds were very few in number.

Rossweisse Class was where all these young Ds were gathered.

Thinking it would be better to visit a place with children the same age as Tia first, I picked Rossweisse Class first, but—

"Thank you for coming!"

"Please come again!"

—While the girls in monster costumes saw us off, I walked unsteadily out of their classroom.

"S-So exhausting..."

I exhaled deeply and remarked. Lisa agreed and nodded with a feeble look.

"I really can't keep up with the energy of young girls..."

The first classroom had already consumed a lot of our energy.

They were doing a haunted house.

But the scariness was zero. It would not be a stretch to say that from start to end, it was like playing with exceptionally hyper girls in costume.

"So fun!"

But Tia looked satisfied, grinning from ear to ear. As expected of someone from the same age group, she seemed to be able to keep up with their pace. When the haunted house was suggested in our discussion last time, she was still quite scared, but this kind of not scary haunted house was evidently fine.

"Okay... Next one."

Thinking it was fine as long as Tia was having as much fun as possible, we headed to Gerhilde Class next.

Gerhilde Class seemed to be doing a performance. A girl dressed in medieval clothing was standing at the entrance to pull in customers.

"Oh, Tia-chan!"

The girl showed joy on her face as soon as she saw us.

"It's been so long, Mayumi!"

"You know her?"

I asked Tia and she nodded.

"When dropping the bomb on Basilisk, we worked hard together!"

Speaking of which, back then, Tia had joined the Counter-Dragon Squad to support Mistilteinn. This girl was probably part of that group. Reminded by Tia, I felt like I had seen her before.

"Eh... Is this person beside Tia-chan actually Yuu-sama!?"

Mayumi noticed me despite my crossdressing disguise and exclaimed in surprise. In that instant, the other girls suddenly poked their heads out from the classroom together.

"Wow, it really is Yuu-sama! Lisa-sama is here too!"

"Even in a female uniform, he still looks so gallant!"

"Ah, idiot! The school gave orders that Yuu-sama's crossdressing has to be kept secret!"

"People from outside aren't here yet, so it's fine. Okay, Mayumi! Hurry and lead the way for them!"

The girls screamed and cheered, watching us with excited eyes. "Yuu-sama" bothered me a lot and I felt extremely uncomfortable.

"Please come this way, everyone! I will lead you to the VIP seats!"

Urged by her classmates, Mayumi led us to our seats.

A small stage was set up in their classroom.

"Ours is a drama performance! Please enjoy 'The Adventures of Yuu the Hero'!"

"—Huh?"

Hearing the title of the play, I had a bad feeling but before I could speak, the classroom went dark and a light shone on the stage.

The story then started, it was about a hero named Yuu who defeated evil dragons one after another.

The protagonist was totally based on me. While watching the play, I kept yelling in my mind "can I just find a hole to bury myself?"

"It was super fun to watch!"

After the play ended and we walked out of Gerhilde Class, Tia commented, her excitement still not yet faded.

"Fufu, Yuu the Hero, what a grand performance."

Lisa laughed while teasing me. During the play, Lisa had been laughing the whole time, keeping her voice down. Due to laughing to much, there were even tears in the corners of her eyes.

"Don't call me with that..."

Were they trying to shame me to death with praise? Thinking that, I sighed. Back when putting on the female uniform this morning, I was thinking there would not be anything more embarrassing than that, but who knew that it would get dethroned so quickly...

The first two classrooms had sapped my mental strength almost to the limit. But even so, I still went with Tia and Lisa to visit other classrooms.

While we were touring around, outside visitors gradually increased in number. They were probably relatives of Ds and other involved parties invited from outside.

"—Let's make a visit to our classroom first, because I'd like to report the results of our reconnaissance. Also... Your parents are probably waiting for you."

After lunch at Ortlinde Class' maid cafe, Lisa suggested to me.

By this point, we had checked out five homerooms—more than half. It was definitely time to make a trip back.

"Tia wants to see Yuu's papa and mama too!"

"—Got it, let's go."

I prepared myself and nodded. I just had to say hi then go visit other homerooms with Tia and Lisa before my condition got exposed.

While thinking of ways to listen without speaking as much as possible, I walked back to Brynhildr Class.

What I had to pay the most attention to was not recognizing the wrong people. After all, I currently could not even recall my parents' faces.

However, I stopped before reaching my homeroom.

Not because of fear but surprise.

Seeing him, who was not supposed to appear here, my body froze on reflex.

My excitement from the school festival atmosphere was frozen solid in an instant.

Leaning against the wall, he made eye contact with me. A cold smile instantly surfaced on the corners of his lips.

"2nd Lieutenant Mononobe, the way you're dressed is truly a joy to behold."

Checking out my crossdressing look, the man in the NIFL military uniform—Major Loki Jotunheim—spoke.

"Major Loki... Why are you here—"

"This isn't anything surprising. Since Midgard is holding such an event, it is normal for NIFL to send an observing delegation and I'm one of them."

This man was my direct superior back in NIFL. He answered with a grin on his face.

Although Midgard and NIFL's relationship was not particularly good, even so, I understood that Midgard could not disregard NIFL in this kind of promotional activity, still—

"Given your position, Major Loki, you wouldn't take on this kind of 'overt' mission, would you? What is your goal?"

One could call him someone who lived in NIFL's dark side who was almost never active in an aboveboard role like this. Conversely, if he was taking action, then there must be corresponding reasons.

"Because I wanted to talk to you directly. Can I have a moment of your time?"

Hearing him say he was here to see me, I felt some kind of premonition rocking my heart, telling me that things were definitely unusual.

"I understand. Lisa, Tia, please head back to the classroom first."

I nodded to Major Loki and urged the two of them, who had been unable to get a word in, to leave.

"You want us to leave first...? Who is that man? If you are going somewhere else, I shall come along."

"Tia wants to go with Yuu too!"

I felt anxious and uneasy to see that Lisa and Tia wanting to come along, so I shook my head and refused them clearly.

"—No. Do not come no matter what."

I could not allow them to get involved with Major Loki—Deciding that in my mind, I told them that.

Taken aback in surprise by my forceful rejection, they could not speak for a moment.

"Major Loki, let's go somewhere else."

Taking that chance to lead Major Loki away, I left quickly.

This was to get Major Loki away from them as quickly as possible—

Part 5

Having invited external visitors, Midgard was bustling everywhere. It was not easy to find a place to talk without getting disturbed by others.

Hence, I took Major Loki to the school roof which was forbidden to entry during the school festival.

"So hot."

Major Loki looked up at the sun in annoyance and grumbled quietly.

"Because it's a tropical island near the equator. So, what exactly do you want to talk to me about?"

Just to be on the safe side, after confirming there was no one present, I asked him cautiously.

"Well, to be honest, there's no particularly important topic, because the main point is to meet you directly."

Indeed, if it was just talking, he could get things done by making a call like before.

However, for him to take such pains to mingle among the observing delegation, to meet me here. It would not be excessive to be wary under these circumstances.

"After seeing me... Did you learn anything?"

"Yes, I learned very clearly that you are enjoying your school life."

Seeing me in a female uniform, he smiled wryly with a complicated feelings on his face. Then Major Loki wiped away his expression.

"But I still know nothing of what I wish to learn. Hence I must confirm it."

"!?"

In that instant, I reflexively distanced myself from Major Loki.

Immediately, a chill ran along my spine and I sweated profusely.

Major Loki had not moved at all, but I felt as though a knife was being held against my throat—That was the intense sense of crisis I felt.

"—You've grown lax, 2nd Lieutenant Mononobe."

Major Loki spoke expressionlessly. He had already reduced our distance back to what it was just now.

...Huh?

The distance I had gained by jumping backwards had vanished.

Seizing the moment when I blinked, he must have closed in all at once.

While I was speculating on the situation like this, Major Loki had already delivered a sweeping kick, throwing me off balance.

Immediately, my view spun around and I saw the blue sky and white clouds. My breathing was interrupted by an impact on my back. Seeing the sole of a shoe descending, I hastily twisted my body.

Seizing the opening when I was changing posture, Major Loki grabbed my arm and subdued me on the floor.

"Too easy. Although you defeated Hreidmar, this is all you can do without the intent to kill."

Major Loki kept me restrained while he talked.

"What the hell do you want...? Are you just trying to test my abilities?"

Completely immobilized, I asked Major Loki while he was staring coldly at me.

"I won't waste my breath on something like that. Since the current 2nd Lieutenant Mononobe has no reason to kill me, your 'Fafnir' will not attack. There's no point in testing you when you're not serious."

"Then why are you doing this—"

"Because I wanted to confirm what exactly is obstructing 'Fafnir' from becoming complete."

Major Loki immediately stared into my eyes as soon as he finished speaking.

That gaze reminded me of my first encounter with him. Those eyes were observing me, appraising me.

An unpleasant feeling rose up, as though someone was peeking at the bottom of my heart, but I could not move my gaze away, because my instincts were warning me of danger and refusing to show an opening in front of him.

"The current 2nd Lieutenant Mononobe—has no gaps."

"Gaps?"

I repeated what Major Loki said.

"The first time we met, you happened to be broken just right, full of gaps. But right now, despite being clearly more severely broken than before, it feels like your gaps have decreased."

"...!"

Feeling as though he had seen through my loss of memories, I could not help but freeze.

"What exactly have you stuffed into the broken parts? What did you use to fill up the gaps?"

"What—"

The weapons data downloaded from Yggdrasil flashed across my mind, but of course, I could not bring that up.

Seeing me stutter, Major Loki lowered the pitch of his voice slightly.

"2nd Lieutenant Mononobe, have you become the puppet of that abominable 'Gray'?"

"Gray...?"

I frowned, not knowing what he was talking about. Seeing my reaction, Major Loki exhaled.

"Forget it if you don't know. But it it's not 'Gray' who did it, the most likely possibility is the one who broke you in the first place."

Major Loki narrowed his eyes and finished, then released my arm. However, I was only liberated for a fleeting moment. This time, he grabbed my face in his hand. Gripping my face forcefully, Major Loki then said:

"I don't know who you are, but I'm warning you. Perhaps you might be the first to have set your sights on him, but he is mine. As long as 'Fafnir' remains, he will never belong to you."

Instead of me, Major Loki was addressing something else, declaring in a cold voice.

——.

At this moment, I seemed to hear a certain voice in my head.

...Must eliminate.

Dark emotions of unidentified origins surged from the bottom of my heart.

However, from the gaps between Major Loki's fingers that were obscuring my view, I saw *my left arm move on its own*.

Dark matter appeared on my left hand and transmuted into a metal shard.

"Eh...?"

Just as I was feeling baffled, not understanding what was happening, my left hand move the metal shard's sharp edge towards Major Loki—

"Hey! What are you doing over there!?"

But just at that moment, a sonorous roar resounded across the roof.

Surprised, I flinched and my left arm stopped moving as well. I looked in the voice's direction to see Lisa there with alarm on her face.

"...Someone came to interfere huh."

Major Loki left me then shrugged in disappointment.

Finally freed, I looked at my left hand that was holding the metal shard tightly.

Just now... What was that? I attempted to kill Major Loki?"

It was almost like my left arm moved on its own, but that should be impossible. Most likely, I instinctively sensed dangerous and my subconscious awakened "Fafnir."

However, even if I wanted to make myself accept this explanation, my heart still felt that something was not right. Because my actions had contradicted my will to such a degree, this had never happened before.

"In any case, I now have a grasp on your situation. As for dragging out that certain existence which is obstructing 'Fafnir,' I'll leave that for the next opportunity."

Major Loki finished and walked over the roof stairs where Lisa was.

"—H-Hold it, if you were subjecting him to violence, I shall not let this go without repercussions!"

Lisa glared at the approaching Major Loki and said.

"You misunderstand. I was simply helping my former subordinate train a little."

Major Loki shrugged and turned his gaze to me.

"...He's telling the truth, don't worry."

To avoid getting Lisa involved in troublesome things, I backed up what Major Loki said.

"B-But..."

Lisa still looked unconvinced but Major Loki went past her and disappeared down the stairwell.

After looking alternately between Major Loki and me, Lisa ran over to me.

"Are you okay? Tia-san said she still felt worried, so we split up to find you... I never thought you'd end up in this kind of situation."

I was collapsed on the floor. Lisa knelt down next to me and inquired of my condition in worry.

"Yeah, I'm fine—!?"

I nodded and stood up but felt a sudden headache. The metal shard dropped from my hand.

"What is the matter with you!?"

Lisa caught and steadied me, but I could not answer.

Suffering from a splitting headache, I held my left hand to my forehead, but then I discovered that even my left hand was totally drained of strength too.

It felt very distant. I had difficulty transmitting my will to my fingertips.

"Did you hit your head when you fell earlier? Pull yourself together! I will call for someone right away."

Just as I looked up to see Lisa take out her phone and make a call—My consciousness fell into darkness.

"Thank goodness—You woke up, Nii-san."

I opened my eyes to see Mitsuki peering at me. The ceiling was red from the setting sun.

"This place is...?"

My consciousness was still hazy, so I asked her.

"This is the infirmary. I heard you suddenly fainted, Nii-san. Please know that I was very worried, okay? Although tests came up with nothing, please rest more."

Mitsuki looked at me with a complicated expression of relief and anger.

"How long... did I sleep for?"

"Approximately five hours. Unfortunately, the school festival has ended for the first day."

Hearing her say that, I discovered I had forgotten something important.

"And Father and Mother?"

"They went back after seeing your sleeping face, Nii-san. Seriously... You not only failed to reassure them, but even made them more worried."

Mitsuki sighed deeply.

"I see... They went back already."

Despite feeling apologetic, I still breathed a sigh of relief.

"Also, the Major Loki Jotunheim who allegedly helped you 'train' has also left Midgard. He simply said his task was done without even a single word of apology..."

Mitsuki spoke with intense anger.

Hearing that Major Loki was no longer at Midgard, my body instantly relaxed.

If that was the case, I could rest assured for now.

Major Loki said he would wait for the next opportunity. If he had already left Midgard, then I would not be seeing him for now.

"Speaking of which, I promised Tia to visit all the other homerooms. I really let her down."

Just as I could relax, these feelings of regret surged.

"Do not worry, Tia-san does not mind. Everyone is purely worried for your sake, Nii-san."

"Right now... Where are Tia and the others?"

"They are at the classroom cleaning up for today and replenishing supplies in preparation for tomorrow. Although you are on duty tomorrow, Nii-san, please do not overexert yourself."

Although Mitsuki was trying to be accommodating for me, I could not accept.

"No, it's okay. I'll do my job properly tomorrow."

Saying that, I sat up.

The headache that attacked me before I lost consciousness had subsided completely.

Tomorrow was not just about my shift at the teahouse, but also the important mission of acting as Lisa's boyfriend.

Hence, I must not rest.

She hoped for freedom, even if it would only last during her time at Midgard, and I wanted to make her wish come true.

To me, this school was like paradise, a place that had helped me to escape my burdensome bonds.

Precisely because of that, I felt I could understand Lisa's feelings.

"Nii-san..."

However, Mitsuki looked at me with extreme worry.

Part 6

The next day, it was the second day of the school festival.

Like the first day, the members of Brynhildr Class came to school early and had meeting before starting to prepare breakfast.

Today, Mitsuki, Lisa, Tia and I, the four of us were in charge of serving customers and the kitchen.

After changing in a different room from the girls, I entered the spare classroom to start cooking.

As expected, it took longer for girls to get changed. Mitsuki and the others arrived slightly later.

"Yuu, thanks for waiting!"

Tia had changed into a pink kimono, running to me with full vitality.

"Wow, Yuu so handsome!"

Seeing me dressed in a jinbei set, she stared at me with eyes shining with excitement.

"—Thank you, you look very cute too, Tia."

I rubbed her head with slightly embarrassed feelings.

"Ehehe... So happy. Yesterday's Yuu was so cute, but Tia likes the handsome Yuu better."

"P-Please don't remind me of that ever again..."

With my hand on my forehead, I sighed.

"Nii-san, are you still feeling unwell?"

However, my gesture was misinterpreted and Mitsuki asked me with concern.

"No, I'm fine, it's just that it depresses me when I recall yesterday's crossdressing."

Hearing my reply, Mitsuki smiled wryly.

"Good to know. The visitors today are all people who know of your existence, Nii-san, so no need to worry."

"Yeah—Oh by the way... Kimonos really suit you, Mitsuki, and your hairpin looks great."

I carefully examined my younger sister in her kimono.

The kimono was exquisitely crafted, of course, but as the wearer, Mitsuki herself had put a lot of effort on the details too. A glittering hairpin was embedded in her tied up hair, contributing to the overall impression.

"T-Thank you. This hairpin is a gift from Father and Mother yesterday."

Blushing, Mitsuki touched her hairpin.

"I see... So they prepared it specially because we're running a Japanese teahouse."

I ended up not seeing my parents and could not recall their faces. This filled me with feelings almost as though I had committed a crime.

But while I was thinking over these things and checking out Mitsuki's kimono look, someone timidly tugged my sleeve from the side.

"M-Mononobe Yuu, how is my kimono?"

Lisa's voice was slightly reprimanding as she asked me.

"Eh? O-Oh, of course it looks very good on you."

Lisa was wearing a yellow kimono, giving a very refreshing image and highly attractive.

"...What half-hearted praise. Are you aware of what you need to do today?"

However, Lisa glared at me in displeasure, in other words, she wanted me to praise her as a boyfriend would.

Indeed, today was the all-important real event. I had to pay attention starting now.

"Got it, here goes—"

I placed my hand on Lisa's shoulder and looked her directly in the eye.

"Lisa, you're beautiful."

"Hawah!"

But the instant I said that, Lisa immediately went red in the face and flung my hand away.

"What did I do wrong?"

"N-Nothing, I was merely a bit careless just now. My mental preparation isn't sufficient yet."

Holding her hand on her chest, Lisa replied reluctantly.

"Nii-san, Lisa-san... What on earth are you two doing?

Seeing us like that, Mitsuki stared in amazement.

"N-Nothing! Come, let us make breakfast."

Lisa spoke as though trying to cover things up and put on her work apron.

Thus, the cooking of breakfast began.

Lisa and I were standing next to each other. I chopped up the ingredients for miso soup while whispering to Lisa, whose face was still red:

"Lisa, when are we telling the others? In the end, we couldn't speak up during the meeting..."

We still had not told the class about Lisa and I pretending to be a couple for today.

"After this, I intend to bring it up during breakfast. Because a weird misunderstanding could arise if you spoke, please leave all the explaining to me."

"Got it. Yeah, things could definitely get very bad if anything goes wrong with the explanation..."

Iris severely misunderstood me when I first explained to her that Lisa had asked me to play the part of her boyfriend. In consideration of that, I thought it would be best to leave the explaining to Lisa.

However, I still had not noticed yet—

I had not noticed that Lisa was already so nervous that she could not maintain her sense of mind.

"E-Excuse me! Actually, Mononobe Yuu and I will be a couple today!"

It was the first thing Lisa said at the breakfast table.

Amidst the harmonious atmosphere of a meal, Lisa cried out without warning. Everyone stared at her in dumbfounded shock.

"Hey... Lisa, putting it that way is very bad!"

Although she told me not to butt in, I still could not refrain from reminding her.

"Oh—T-That's right."

Lisa came back to her senses then stood up frantically and cleared her throat.

"Sorry for startling everyone, but please listen to a few words from me."

Under everyone's shocked gazes, Lisa started explaining again.

But this time, her explanation also lacked a crucial component.

"I-I will be introducing him to my parents as my boyfriend today, consequently, I would like everyone's assistance in this matter—"

"Introducing him to your parents... Lisa, are you getting married to Mononobe-kun?"

Firill asked Lisa anxiously.

Hearing this, Tia cried out in alarm:

"N-No, even if it's Lisa! Yuu has to be Tia's husband!"

Expressionlessly, Mitsuki turned her gaze to me.

"—Nii-san, what is going on here?"

Then I saw Iris staring at me tearfully.

"M-Mononobe... Are you marrying Lisa-chan?"

"Hey, why are you getting the wrong idea as well, even you, Iris!? I already explained the whole story to you, right!?"

Amidst the chaos, I still retorted to Iris.

But during this time, the misunderstanding was snowballing out of control.

"Oh... So you two are in that kind of relationship, I didn't even know. When did you start?"

Ariella asked Lisa in surprise. Lisa replied in a fluster:

"U-Umm, it was a month ago when I asked him about this."

"So you've been going out that long ago... Come to think of it, you two have been especially close lately."

"Mm."

Ariella kept nodding her head and Ren agreed.

"W-Wrong! That isn't what I mean!"

Lisa frantically tried to clear up the misunderstanding.

However, the more she tried to explain, the weirder the interpretations went. It finally took us quite a long time to explain the whole story clearly.

"—In other words, Nii-san is playing the part of Lisa-san's boyfriend in order to disrupt her engagement."

"Y-Yeah..."

What took me tons of talking to explain was concisely summed up by Mitsuki in a single sentence.

I stared at Lisa coldly. Had she explained in this way from the start, things would not have been so hard.

"I am ashamed for causing everyone to misunderstand."

Lisa slumped her shoulders dejectedly, feeling responsible.

"So I see... What a relief."

Firill breathed a sigh of relief.

"If Lisa has trouble, Tia will help too!"

After figuring out the situation, Tia spoke, reassured.

"Seriously, Mononobe... You scared me there."

"No, like I said, Iris, why would you be surprised even though you know the story..."

Seeing Iris breathe a sigh of relief, I could not help but sigh.

"So we just need to say things to support when Lisa's parents come, right?"

Ariella raised her hand and asked.

Lisa nodded affirmatively and bowed her head to everyone.

"Yes, it would be a great help if everyone did that. Please lend me your assistance."

"We'll do this kind of thing even if you didn't make a request. Leave it to us."

"Mm."

Ariella agreed readily and Ren followed suit.

Everyone else nodded matter-of-factly.

"...Thank you, everyone."

Lisa thanked them with an expression of sincere joy then wiped the tears from the corners of her eyes with her finger.

"Then let us use this moment to decide on a concrete strategy. For Lisa-san's sake, we must not fail, however..."

Mitsuki spoke seriously then looked at me uneasily.

"After putting on this performance, would things develop to the point that Lisa-san and Nii-san have no choice but to get married?"

"No need to worry about that, because unless someone's social standing and family background matches the Highwalker family... He cannot be considered my prospective suitor."

Lisa reassured Mitsuki.

But I could hear a hint of sadness in her voice.

"Then we will visit the other homerooms and come back. Mononobe, you guys do your best!"

Iris encouraged me then left the classroom with Ariella and Ren.

Like what we did yesterday, she intended to check out the other homeroom's shops.

"Since I've met Lisa's parents before, I'll report back when I spot them."

After saying that, Firill followed Iris and left.

Her parents—the king and queen of Erlia—were supposed to be guests for today, but were apparently too busy with state matters to visit, having succeeded the throne recently.

Lisa was the only one with relatives scheduled to visit today.

After discussing how to react when Lisa's parents arrived, Mitsuki, Lisa, Tia and I, the four of us began preparations to open shop. Then an unexpected situation came up.

"What a long line up..."

Lisa peered out of the corridor window and remarked.

Even though we had clearly not opened shop yet, there was already a long line outside Brynhildr Class' entrance.

"Was there this many people yesterday?"

Since I fainted before returning to the classroom, I did not know what business was like after we opened shop yesterday.

Hence, I thought there were just as many people yesterday but Tia shook her head.

"No, yesterday had less."

"This is probably... due to Nii-san."

Mitsuki glared at me.

"Huh? But I didn't do anything, did I?"

I was completely baffled so I asked.

Hearing me say that, Lisa shrugged in exasperation.

"Your comprehension is hopeless. You are standing in the shop today. People are presumably gathering here because they heard rumors about this."

"Yuu is so popular! Thanks to Yuu, there are so many customers!"

Tia raised her arms in joy.

"People will surely protest if we do not let Nii-san serve them out in the shop. Until the school girls finish their patronage, Nii-san, you will be in charge of serving them."

"G-Got it."

I agreed while feeling troubled by this development.

"Nii-san, do not get carried away by the attention, okay?"

Mitsuki warned me with displeasure on her face.

"Mononobe Yuu, today you are p-playing the part of my boyfriend, so I forbid you from leering at girls."

Lisa also glared at me and warned.

"Tia is happy that Yuu is popular but don't make a move on customers!"

Even Tia was reminding me like this. I could not help but sigh.

"I know without needing all these repeated reminders."

Wondering if they truly distrusted me, I answered. But when the shop opened for real, I discovered that the situation had far exceeded my expectations.

"Yuu-sama, please shake hands with me!"

"Umm... Can I have an autograph?"

The screaming school girls made such demands one after another, putting me in a panic.

W-What was going on? This could not be happening no matter what, right?

Was someone playing some kind of trick on me? Although this crossed my mind, the girls' gazes at me were very serious. I was overwhelmed by their vigor.

Even if I wanted to cry for help, I was the only one in the classroom.

Due to too many customers, the other three were in the adjacent spare classroom, focused on cooking.

"Yuu-sama! Umm... C-Can I take a photo?"

"S-Sure..."

Just as I made a twitching smile in response to her request, Lisa appeared, carrying food.

"Photos are forbidden. Isn't it written on the notice at the entrance?"

"S-Sorry..."

Reprimanded by Lisa, the girl bowed her head in dejection.

Then Lisa pointed her finger at me.

"You have to keep the rules in mind too. Have you forgotten what I said earlier?"

Out of the customer's sight, Lisa pinched me in the thigh.

"S-Sorry... I blanked out because the situation was too chaotic, I never expected so many people..."

I apologized and Lisa released me with a helpless expression.

"Fine—this is possibly a backlash to sustained suppression since Mitsuki-san had been restraining everyone by the rule on 'inappropriate interactions between the genders.' But today, everyone can talk to you without reservation as customers, so things are going out of control. This cannot be avoided perhaps."

Lisa cleared away empty dishes and spoke, but in the end, she added a sentence sarcastically.

"Because of that, you should enjoy the feeling of being an idol and indulge them to some extent. However, please exercise restraint."

Lisa smiled in a terrifying manner then left the classroom.

Left on my own, I was overwhelmed by the girls' vigor again.

"Finally freed..."

In the afternoon, the line of school girls was finally interrupted and outside visitors started lining up. Hence I was permitted to retreat to the spare classroom where the cooking took place.

But just as I was sprawled on a desk in exhaustion, Lisa pushed my shoulder.

"Okay, no time to rest. There are many customers in the shop, so you must continue to cook and work quickly."

"...Understood."

I got up unsteadily and began to cook with Lisa.

Mitsuki and Tia were serving customers, leaving only Lisa and me in the unused classroom.

"Your parents haven't come, Lisa?"

While making a customer's order, I asked Lisa.

"I have no idea either, but they should be coming soon... However, I did not ask them when in particular they were going to arrive. Every time I carry food over, I check the line, so I will tell you if they arrive."

"—I want them to come faster, because it's tough working with my nerves tense the whole time... And according to Mitsuki's plan, we can't rest before your parents arrive."

While cooking more miso soup for who knew how many times, I exhaled in fatigue.

"I remember that according to the plan, we will be putting up a notice of a temporary break when my parents arrive."

Lisa tasted the miso soup's concentration while confirming the plan.

"Yeah. After all, it'll probably cause a huge uproar if we act as a couple in front of other students. So I'll greet your parents as your boyfriend after the classroom is cleared of customers."

I recounted the steps and Lisa immediately threw a sideways glance at me.

"You seem quite confident. To think I am clearly so nervous..."

Lisa grumbled to me, sounding like she was complaining about the unfairness.

"I'm nervous too, but by this point, all we can do is brace ourselves. We've done everything we can."

"Is that so...? Just before the school festival, we were really so busy and almost had no time to practice being a couple. To be honest, preparations are not perfect."

Lisa spoke with a stiff expression. In the morning when explaining to the class, I could sense that she was shouldering extra pressure today. Perhaps she felt guilty for deceiving her parents.

Seeing her like that, I guess offering her encouragement was my job as her acting boyfriend.

"—Don't worry."

I put down the kitchen utensil in my hand and held Lisa's hands.

"W-What are you doing!?"

Lisa went red in the face and screamed in surprise.

"No matter how busy, we've been practicing holding hands all along. Don't you feel your mindset switching naturally just by holding hands like this? I feel I can behave as your boyfriend flawlessly now, you know?"

To reassure her, I smiled at Lisa. Just by recalling our repeated practice over the past month as well as working side by side till now, my confidence was surging.

"...Yes."

Lisa relaxed. She smiled lightly and looked up at me.

"Thank you, I have calmed down slightly. However... I still cannot be confident like you, so—"

She turned her body and stared at me square with moistened eyes.

"Should we have some final practice?"

Lisa looked up and asked me.

"Final practice?"

Not understanding what she was asking for, I responded in puzzlement with a question.

"...Make me experience something more like a girlfriend than holding hands."

Lisa stared at me passionately and drew her face closer.

At this moment, I finally understood her intent.

"Eh? Hey... W-Wait!"

I frantically tried to stop her but she refused to separate from me.

"—What does it matter? After all, you and I will never have a future. No matter what you do... Ultimately, it will be as if nothing ever happened."

Lisa smiled sadly then tiptoed slightly.

Her pink lips approached, her fiery breath making light contact.

But just at that moment, footsteps could be heard faintly from outside the classroom.

"!?"

Lisa backed away, suddenly regaining her senses. I frantically pulled back from Lisa too.

The door was opened forcefully.

Carrying empty utensils and trays, Tia rushed into the classroom.

"Right now, Firill and the others are bringing Lisa's papa and mama over!"

Tia reported loudly to us.

"I-I got it."

Lisa replied to Tia, unable to hide the panic in her voice.

Then she looked at me in embarrassment and said quietly:

"—Forget what just happened."

When saying that, Lisa showed great sadness in her expression—I felt a stabbing pain in my heart.

"I saw Lisa's parents near the entrance, seemingly lost, so I brought them here directly. Mononobe-kun... I'm leaving Lisa in your hands."

Firill came over to the spare classroom and spoke with a very serious expression.

"Mononobe, do your best!"

"I'll pray for your success, Mononobe-kun."

"Mm."

Returning with Firill, Iris, Ariella and Ren also encouraged me.

Thus, our plan was put into motion.

According to plan, we immediately put up a notice for a temporary break at the classroom entrance when Lisa's parents entered the shop.

Although students in line objected, we responded by passing out number tags as an emergency measure, trying everything we could to disperse them first.

To prevent people from eavesdropping, Firill, Iris, Ariella and Ren, the four not on duty in the shop today, were on watch outside the classroom.

Lisa and Mitsuki were in charge of serving them while Tia and I cooked and waited for the opportunity to make an appearance.

"—Nii-san, everyone else has left the classroom."

Soon after, Mitsuki returned to report.

"What's Lisa doing?"

"Talking to her parents. I heard mentions of engagement, so it is probably time for you to head over, Nii-san."

Mitsuki answered while deftly pouring green tea from a pot into a cup.

"They were in need of refills just now, so please bring this over."

"—Got it."

I placed on a tray the cups of tea that Mitsuki had poured then nodded firmly.

"Yuu, good luck!"

"Nii-san, I am counting on you."

With Tia and Mitsuki's encouragements, I head to Lisa's side.

Carrying the tray into the classroom, I saw a couple with elegant airs sitting at a table, looking in my direction.

—So these are Lisa's parents.

The woman looked like an older Lisa while the man was tall and slender. The word "gentleman" would be a fitting description.

Standing next to them, Lisa saw me arrive and immediately breathed a sigh of relief.

It looked like just as Mitsuki said, they were talking about the matter of an engagement.

"Thank you for your patience."

I bowed to Lisa's parents then set the tea before them.

I could see a thick photo album spread open on the table, showing pictures of men on the pages. They were probably prospective suitors for Lisa.

"Oh... So you are the male D who is the subject of many a conversation."

When I glanced at the photo album, Lisa's father talked to me, apparently quite interested.

"Yes, I am Mononobe Yuu."

"My name is Mark Highwalker and I am Lisa's father. Thank you for looking after my daughter."

"No, not at all..."

I extended his hand cordially. Despite feeling surprised and confused, I still shook hands with him.

He was the CEO of a huge corporate group with intimate ties to NIFL as well, originally a VIP whom I would not get to converse with, but I could sense from him an open-mindedness that lowered my guard.

Then Lisa's mother introduced herself.

"I am Linda Highwalker. It is a pleasure to meet you."

Mrs. Highwalker smiled gently and nodded to greet me.

"Y-Yes, the pleasure is all mine."

I frantically bowed my head as well.

Then as though waiting for a pause in the conversation, Lisa leaned against me in a natural motion.

She looked like she intended to announce things immediately.

"Father, Mother, actually he and I—We are currently dating."

Lisa announced clearly to her parents.

"Ehhh!?"

Mrs. Highwalker exclaimed in surprise while Mr. Highwalker widened his eyes.

"Is that... true?"

But he did not lose his cool. Cautiously, he asked Lisa.

"Indeed."

Clutching my clothing tightly, Lisa nodded affirmatively.

Although she had long resolved herself, even so, I could still feel faint trembling from Lisa.

I could not leave her to face things alone, because right now, I was... Lisa's boyfriend.

Wrapping my arm around Lisa's shoulders, I drew her body towards me in an embrace.

"Oh—"

Resting her head against my chest, Lisa blushed red.

"Just as Lisa said, I am currently dating her. Naturally, we are following Midgard's rules and adhering to standards of decency."

Ds lost their powers during pregnancy or upon reaching the age of twenty or so, hence Midgard would forbid impure relations between the genders, of course. Mitsuki also warned me many times.

Precisely because of that, I had to state things for the record. We were not breaking any of Midgard's rules.

"...I see."

Mr. Highwalker seemed to understand correctly what I was trying to convey. He nodded lightly in response.

"Lisa, do you love him?"

Mrs. Highwalker still seemed shaken inside. She asked Lisa.

"Yes, I love him from the bottom of my heart, therefore..."

Lisa asserted in a strong tone of voice then motioned with her eyes at the open photo album on the table.

"—I cannot consider anyone else at the moment."

"I see..."

Mrs. Highwalker sighed, apparently at a loss what to do.

However, she immediately smiled and turned her gaze to her husband.

"Looks like all we can do is give our blessings to Lisa's first love."

"...Indeed. Now is the time to rejoice for our daughter's growth."

Mr. Highwalker nodded in agreement and applauded.

"Eh...?"

I was originally prepared for a dispute so this felt a bit disarming.

Lisa had said that as long as we made it clear that we were a real couple, her parents would back down honestly—That seemed to be true.

But aren't they being too reasonable here?

Things were going so smoothly that it felt unsettling.

I could only respond to their blessings with a stiff smile.

"Mononobe-kun, is that right? Please take care of my daughter."

"Y-Yes..."

After confirming my answer, Mr. Highwalker closed up the photo album on the table.

"Lisa, don't make life too difficult for him, okay?"

"—Of course."

Lisa answered in a voice released from tension. It was probably a relief to her that the situation proceeded ideally.

"Then it is almost time for us to take our leave."

"Indeed."

Mrs. Highwalker concurred with Mr. Highwalker and the two rose to their feet.

"T-Thank you."

Lisa chased after her parents who were about to exit the classroom.

When seeing them off at the entrance, Lisa bowed her head and thanked them. On the other hand, I also said "Thank you very much" loudly and watched them leave.

However, just as Mr. Highwalker was about to step out of the classroom, he brought his face close to Lisa's and apparently whispered something.

"...Yes, Father."

Standing some distance away, I did not hear what Mr. Highwalker said.

But Lisa looked extremely depressed and disheartened in her response—This was probably not my imagination.

Part 7

"—It seems to be a success. Good work, Lisa-san and Nii-san."

After Lisa's parents left, everyone entered the classroom. Most likely, they had been listening outside the whole time.

Mitsuki showed relief and congratulated us on our efforts.

"Plan succeeded!"

Tia happily made a "hurray" pose.

"Mononobe-kun, thank you for helping Lisa."

Firill bowed her head and thanked me. She seemed honestly worried about Lisa.

"I knew you'd be fine, Mononobe-kun."

"Mm."

Ariella and Ren also congratulated us on the plan's success. Likewise, Iris smiled at us and said:

"Good work, Mononobe. Lisa, I'm so glad for you!"

"Yes—This is all thanks to everyone's assistance."

Although Lisa responded with smiles, I did not think she was smiling from the heart.

"Then let's get back to touring the school festival, because we were only halfway through."

However, no one noticed the slight gloom that Lisa was hiding. Off duty for today, Iris, Firill, Ariella and Ren exited the classroom.

"We will take a break starting now. Tia and I will prepare some food. Nii-san and Lisa-san, you must exhausted so please wait here."

"Tia will do her best!"

Mitsuki and Tia did not seem to notice anything amiss in Lisa's behavior and they went to the spare classroom used for cooking.

"...I am so grateful to them. Come, have a seat."

Lisa urged me to sit down at the table where Mr. and Mrs. Highwalker had been seated earlier.

I took a seat opposite Lisa.

"Lisa, did it really succeed?"

With only the two of us in the classroom, I asked her hesitantly.

"Yes... Of course."

"Then why were you showing such a gloomy expression?"

"I did not. See, I'm smiling, right?"

Lisa smiled at me but I shook my head.

"No, not at all. Since we've been doing 'couples training' all month long, I can at least tell if your smiles are genuine. What did your father say to you at the end?"

"...!"

I made my decision and tried asking, but Lisa bit her lip and lowered her head.

"Did he say something excessive?"

Seeing Lisa so sad, I was extremely worried, so I asked again, but she shook her head in denial.

"No, Father was simply encouraging me. He said: This will become a wonderful experience, so make the most of your youth and enjoy it."

Lisa answered in a trembling voice.

It definitely sounded like warm encouragement to one's daughter, but Lisa's face was definitely not showing joy.

Unable to bear the sight, I moved over to Lisa's side from my position opposite to her.

Then leaning shoulder to shoulder, just as we normally did when working after school in the classroom, I placed my hand on top of Lisa's trembling hand.

"But those words hurt you, Lisa?"

Looking at Lisa's regretful demeanor, I asked.

"...I'm not hurt, but simply confronted with an understanding of reality once again. These days at Midgard, one day, they will eventually turn into nothing more than an experience."

Lisa replied in an extremely sad tone of voice.

"Experience..."

I could feel that it was an extremely heavy word, because the word "experience" referred to what was accumulated from the past.

If Lisa's father believed our relationship would continue to persist, he would not be using "a wonderful experience" to describe it.

"I think that Father and Mother offers me their sincere blessings regarding my seeing someone, but from their perspective, you... will not be a person relevant to my future. I have come to understand this fully."

Lisa spoke in resignation, turning her gaze out of the window.

"What I can do now is only create memories of youth. As soon as I lose my powers and leave Midgard, everything will become past experience. I will probably get married to someone somewhere."

Looking out at the white clouds floating in the sky, Lisa spoke.

"Lisa, do you think... that's good?"

Seeing the side of Lisa's face, lacking in vitality, I felt very indignant, so I asked.

"There is no question of good or bad. Because to me, there is no other path to choose."

"No, wait, isn't there the option to run away from home? As long as you earn enough money at Midgard, you won't need to rely on your parents."

I offered these words to Lisa who viewed the future with pessimism.

"—I am not arrogant enough to assert that my life belongs to myself alone. Also, more importantly... I cannot betray my parents."

However, Lisa smiled wryly and shook her head.

Naturally, she must have thought of that option without needing me to come up with it, and rejected it herself already.

"Sorry, I didn't think it through enough."

Feeling ashamed of my shallow thinking, I looked away.

"There's no need for you to apologize. I know clearly that you are showing your care for me. Also, despite uttering such high-principled words, I still cannot help but hope—If only I could remain a D forever."

These seemed to be Lisa's true feelings straight from the depths of her heart.

I saw her stare afar, continuing to speak as though in a dream:

"If I could stay here forever, to spend joyful times with Mitsuki-san, the others and you, how happy that would be. But just as one cannot refuse to grow up... These times will eventually come to an end. You will not exist in my future."

Lisa gazed at my face and smiled with melancholy.

"Perhaps precisely because of that, these times are so endearing."

Saying that, Lisa drew near and kissed me on the cheek.

"What!?"

I touched my cheek in surprise, only to see Lisa smiled mischievously:

"This is my thank you gift—my feelings."

Then she moved her chair away in apparent embarrassment, distancing herself from me.

"H-However, I have not forgotten the original terms of exchange. I will keep searching for a way to recover your memories, although I haven't found any suitable means yet... In any case, I will now give an interim report and offer my current suggestions."

Lisa spoke rapidly as though forcing a change in subject.

But the sensation of her lips on my cheek did not disappear that easily.

"Say, Lisa, that kiss just now—"

"Don't interrupt. Listen to me quietly!"

What kind of feelings did the kiss convey? I wanted to ask that, but she cut me off while blushing.

Also, she sounded ferocious, as though she would pounce and bite me if I said anything more.

"G-Got it. Please tell me."

I nodded to appease her then entered a listening pose.

"Goodness gracious... Stop thinking nonsense and put your mind on track. Focus and listen to me, this is extremely important."

Lisa reminded me strongly then proposed her thoughts regarding my memories.

"First of all, I've come to learn one fact through my research. Namely, memories are not lost that easily. Even if they appear to be lost, they might simply be in an accessible state while the memories themselves still exist in the brain."

"But I think my memories might've been overwritten by the weapons data downloaded from Yggdrasil. Won't memories vanish in that case?"

I asked my question and Lisa immediately shook her head.

"No, that idea is wrong. To begin with, human brains do not erase old memories even when they record new information. Suppose there was a method to overwrite things without regard for the brain's memories, it would most likely destroy the brain and personality."

"Then my memories... really remain somewhere in the brain?"

I found it hard to believe, so I asked Lisa.

"It is highly improbable for long-term memories settled in the brain to vanish suddenly. It would be a different matter if the brain was damaged physically, but there is no such obstacle in your case. To be honest, after you fainted, I already had people perform intricate examinations on your brain."

I was impressed that Lisa had taken advantage of yesterday's unexpected incident.

"I didn't even know about that... You're so reliable, Lisa."

"O-Of course."

Lisa scratched her cheek shyly then resumed the conversation.

"So judging from these symptoms, your condition is extremely unnatural. If you were simply transmitted a huge volume of information, I don't believe it would cause memory loss."

Looking into my eyes, Lisa asserted clearly.

"—But I am suffering from that in fact, right?"

"Even conceding a hundred compromises and assume that your memory disorder stems from some kind of error, losing memories starting from the earliest ones is still extremely weird. It would only be natural if it started with more recent memories that had yet to stabilize in the brain."

"That definitely makes sense..."

Why were all the lost memories from before I was taken to NIFL? That question did occur to me

"So I speculate that perhaps Yggdrasil might have transmitted something else to you, apart from weapons data."

"Something else apart from weapons data?"

I gulped and asked. Lisa nodded with a serious expression.

"If I had to give an example, it would be something like a computer virus."

"What...?"

"I believe that it entered your mind in the form of 'information' then severed your memories with clear intent. Perhaps something with properties similar to a computer virus is causing mischief here."

A chill rushed along my spine.

——

I heard a garbled voice from afar, mixed with noise.

"Just as I told you earlier, if Yggdrasil possesses the power of electrical interference, it might not be impossible. Because you were in an unconscious state yesterday, a full check of brainwaves could not be carried out, but if detailed tests were done in the future—"

Lisa's voice began to sound fainter and fainter.

Instead, noise from some kind of source grew louder and louder.

—Threat, recognized. Elimination, of doubt... Impossible. Far exceeded, rectification range.

The noise turned into a voice, echoing in my mind.

—Considering she is obstructing factor in elimination failure the other day, determination: continued lurking is difficult.

I could no longer hear Lisa's voice.

—Review, situation. Neun. Conclusion: immediate action necessary. Eliminate threat then reclaim code.

This cold and robotic voice, could it be Yggdrasil's...

I was struck by a splitting headache. The noisy voice was twisting my thoughts.

The headache felt like being stabbed by pins. My consciousness went hazy.

"Ah!?"

But this cry of pain did not come from my own mouth.

"Huh—?"

Seeing the scene before me, I was rendered dumbstruck.

My left arm—*it had moved on its own to strangle Lisa's neck*.

"Ooh... Ah..."

Lisa stared at me in pain.

"W-Why!? W-Why am I doing this—"

I frantically tried to get my left hand to release but my will did not reach my hand. Despite being able to feel, my hand did not move according to my thoughts.

—Compressed seed, uncompress. Begin assimilation of consciousness.

I tried to use my right arm to pull my left hand away but my right hand could not muster any strength.

"Yggdrasil, is that you? What are you doing with my body—!?"

But ignoring my voice, the fingers of my left hand sank into Lisa's throat.

—Error occurred. Difficulty reaching control territory of other factors. Complete control of consciousness, impossible. But even at current assimilation rate, control of movement not a problem.

"Gah... Someone! Hurry, anyone!!"

I yelled loudly out of the classroom but no one arrived to the rescue.

There were no customers since the shop was on break. My voice probably could not reach Mitsuki and Tia cooking in the adjacent spare classroom.

—In that case, I'll use dark matter to cause an explosion!

I used my last resort, but the instant I generated dark matter, an fierce headache instantly attacked.

Then the generated dark matter ignored my will and turned into a slender woody vine wrapped around my left arm.

Transmuting into plant matter... This was the realm of biogenic transmutation that ordinary Ds could not possibly achieve.

—So Yggdrasil did this?

The vine entangling my left arm controlled my movements despite being on the outside.

The force strangling Lisa's neck increased.

Perhaps unable to make even a sound now, all Lisa could do was open her mouth in pain.

"Guh... Lisa! Use dark matter to transmute explosives. Blow off my arm!"

I desperately tried to persuade Lisa.

But Lisa shook her head slightly with tears in her eyes.

I did not know if she meant that she was in too much pain to generate dark matter, or she refused to do that—

"Damn it! At this rate—Please! Someone!? Anyone—please save Lisa!!"

I could only continue to yell and cry for help.

Although Lisa tried to struggle free of my arm, her resistance was gradually weakening.

Her life was gradually about to be snuffed out, and—It was going to be my doing.

"Stop... Stop it!!"

I yelled at Yggdrasil that was controlling my body against my will.

"What are you doing!? You fool!!"

But at this moment, someone kicked the door down from outside with a loud crash and a petite figure rushed in.

"P-Principal!?"

Blonde hair fluttering, the person glaring at me with blue eyes was Midgard's chief administrator, Principal Charlotte.

"Please! My body isn't obeying me! I don't care what happens to me, please save Lisa immediately!"

Apart from her, there was no one I could seek help from, so I pleaded desperately for her help.

"Tsk—I can't believe it came to this."

The principal clicked her tongue and instantly rushed to our side. She pounced and bit my left arm.

Despite feeling a wave of intense pain, my left arm, not under my control, refused to leave Lisa's neck.

"That won't work! You have to break the arm at least—"

"Don't worry, since you are being controlled—I just need to dominate you who are being controlled."

After saying that, the principal sank her canines deeper into my arm.

In that very instant, I lost all feeling of my left arm as though I had been anaesthetized.

My fingers buried in Lisa relaxed. She struggled free of my hand and collapsed on the floor.

"C-Cough, c-cough!"

Holding her throat, Lisa kept coughing.

—Other factor, mixed in. Assimilation rate lowered. Response to emergency, disconnect terminal and withdraw.

I heard Yggdrasil's voice in my head. The vine entangling my left arm began to squirm in a sinister manner.

"Hmm—"

Although the principal discovered its movements and reached out, the vine disengaged nimbly from my arm and jumped towards the open window.

Seeing the vine vanish outside the window, the principal cursed "Drats, it escaped."

"Charlotte-sama, why did you suddenly break into a run? Ah—Oh dear, what on earth is..."

Maika-san showed up. Seeing our unusual look, she stared with widened eyes.

"This is an emergency, Maika. Find an arbitrary reason to evacuate the visitors out of the island. Also, inform all student terminals of a Type A alert. Issue orders for Haruka to lead the Counter-Dragon Squad to search for 'a mobile vine.' Although they will definitely have questions, I will explain reasons later."

The principal turned her gaze to Maika-san and issued orders concisely.

"—Y-Yes, affirmative."

Maika-san bowed with a tense expression then ran out of the classroom.

"C-Cough, c-cough... Huff... Huff..."

Quieting down, the classroom resounded with Lisa's coughing and irregular breathing noises.

"Sorry... Lisa."

I really wanted to help her get up, but I did not know if I was allowed to approach her in my current state. All I could do was stand there and apologize to her.

"Huff... Huff... Don't make that kind of face, I... am fine."

Lisa looked up and replied to me with a stiff smile.

"But Lisa, I did that, to you—"

"Yggdrasil is the one controlling your body, isn't it? I was too careless on my part too. Despite clearly considering this possibility... After hearing that Yggdrasil had vanished, I could not help but lower my guard."

Lisa shook her head and insisted she was responsible too.

"Probably... You guessed correctly. Something was transmitted to my mind apart from weapons data... I don't know when I'll get controlled again."

I looked at my left hand that had strangled Lisa's neck and replied in regret.

Yggdrasil was not destroyed, all along—It was inside me.

"Don't worry about that, because I'm the one with dominance over your body now."

However, the principal asserted with full confidence.

"Dominance...?"

Speaking of which, she had mentioned something like that when biting my left arm.

"Because I've temporarily dominated you and the thing that has invaded your body, so I already know the gist of things. Seriously—Things ended up like this all because you kept your deal with Yggdrasil secret. This is your fault, you know?"

Arms akimbo, the principal glared at me.

"What... Why do you know this—"

"Understanding simply through domination, that is the kind of authority domination is."

"Authority...? Principal—No, who exactly are you?"

I could sense something mysterious from the principal, so I asked.

"Yes... By this point, I guess I've no choice but to reveal my identity."

The principal nodded and seemed a bit happy for some reason. She raised her hand ostentatiously.

"I am precisely the manager of humans, the king of the human race! I am the mastermind who controls this world from the shadows!"

The principal puffed out her flat chest and declared openly.

"O-Okay..."

Unsure how to react, I concurred ambiguously.

"What's with that daft look of yours? You don't believe me?"

"No—Rather than not believing, it's more like I can't imagine it at all..."

Chapter 3

To suddenly learn that she was the mastermind controlling the world, I only felt confounded by the enormity of the scale. Also, the petite and weak-looking principal totally did not match that image.

"...You're saying I'm not dignified?"

The principal's body shook with a twitching expression on her face.

"Huh? W-Weird, did I say it out loud?"

"You are currently under my dominance, which means your thoughts are being transmitted to me. Seriously... It can't be helped. Then I'll word things differently and prepare myself to be misunderstood."

The principal took a deep breath and continued:

"My predecessor called himself this—the gray dragon—'Gray' Vampire."

Chapter 4 - The Awakened Red Code

Part 1

The fact that Iris and the others encountered *that thing* could only be described as bad luck.

It was a wriggling "piece of vine" that had jumped out of Brynhildr Class' window and fallen on the ground.

Avoiding detection, moving from shadow to shadow, *that thing* ran into the girls in the school's connecting passage by chance.

"W-What is this!?"

Iris cried out in surprise.

The four girls, shocked by the sight of the strange object, were Iris, Firill, Ariella and Ren who were touring the school festival together.

Normally speaking, this would a situation to scream and flee, but they were battle-hardened members of the Counter-Dragon Squad.

"Everyone be careful! I'm not sure but this thing is unusual."

Although news of *that thing* was not yet disseminated, Firill still urged everyone to stay on guard.

Instead of retreating, the girls stepped up to fight.

"Caduceus!"

Iris generated her fictional armament of a staff and faced off against *that thing*.

Firill also summoned a book-shaped fictional armament. Ariella and Ren followed suit.

But just as they prepared for combat, holding their fictional armaments, things changed.

"Eh!?"

The staff-shaped fictional armament in Iris' hand began to twist in form.

It was almost like melting.

This phenomenon caused a chain reaction among them. Their fictional armaments turned back into black spheres of dark matter and were pulled to *that thing*.

Then having left their hands, the dark matter stuck to the *that thing* and changed in form again.

The surface of the dark matter turned mottled green and wriggled in a scary and sinister manner.

Within the blink of an eye, the expanding dark matter turned into green vines as though exploding, become a part of *that thing*.

"What..."

Witnessing the unbelievable phenomenon, Firill cried out in surprise.

The vines transmuted from dark matter entangled with one another, increasing in length and girth, then attacked the girls.

"Everyone hurry and escape!"

The first to recover from the shock was Ariella who urged everyone to retreat.

Hence, the girls turned around to run.

But this decision came a bit too late.

"Kyahhhhhhhh!?"

The tentacle-like vines ensnared the bodies of the girls.

—Code Fünf secured.

Having captured them, *that thing* twisted its body in apparent satisfaction.

But at this moment, a man and a woman heard their screams.

"W-What is this..."

A well-dressed man and woman who looked like a married couple were shocked to see *that thing* capture the girls.

—Recognized as human ruling class, on grounds of self-defense, decision: capture preferable to eliminate.

Then as though crawling on the ground, *that thing* reached out with its vines to swiftly entangle their legs—

Part 2

"Gray dragon... 'Gray' Vampire?"

Hearing the name said by Principal Charlotte, I was stunned and repeated the words.

"Principal, you claim to be a dragon? Or a vampire, so a blood-drinking demon, in other words?"

Listening to the principal together with me, Lisa also showed surprise on her face and asked the principal.

"Who knows? To be honest, I have no idea either. I neither have those monsters' gigantic size nor destructive power. However, my predecessor was the original vampire. This is indisputably correct."

After replying that, the principal added "However, vampire legends are stories that have gone through a lot of embellishments, so I'm not too happy to be compared with them."

"T-The original vampire...? Then the so-called gray dragon is...?"

Unable to figure it out, I looked in doubt at the principal.

"In other words, my predecessor is the one known as the original vampire. He believed he might be similar to the other dragons in nature—That's what it means."

The principal answered while staring into the distance.

"Even if you say that... I still can't understand it at all. Please explain in a comprehensible way."

I had a feeling that some crucial part had been glossed over, so I made my inquiry in this manner. With a smile surfacing on the corners of her lips, she said:

"—A man showed up several centuries ago. Born with the power to control mankind and a strong sense of purpose to protect the world, that man was my predecessor."

Like recounting the past, the principal continued:

"To prevent mankind from destroying the world, he used that power to start managing them. In the modern era, the only reason why humans did not go along the path of self-destruction despite obtaining powerful weapons—It is all thanks to him."

The principal added "he stopped nuclear war and saved the world" in a joking manner then turned her gaze towards me.

"I told you once before that someone had proposed a hypothesis on dragons, right? That was him. This is what he thought when a dragon appeared at the same time as him—That monster is the same. Like him, heaven had conferred it with a powerful authority to accomplish some kind of mission."

After saying that, the principal shrugged.

"Precisely because of that, he named himself the gray dragon. What an undeserved calamity for me, the one who inherited that title."

The gray dragon—"Gray" Vampire.

Could the "Gray" that Major Loki mentioned be referring to the principal?

"Since you're using the word 'inherit,' then he is now..."

"Yes, he is no longer in this world. He shoved all the troublesome stuff onto me, but died. Honestly, I don't love and cherish this world like him, but to prevent his efforts from going to waste, that's why I'm serving as Midgard's principal."

The principal sighed helplessly.

"So working as the principal is the same as saving the world?"

"Currently in human society, the biggest spark of conflict is the existence of Ds. For world stability, the location Midgard is essential, which is why I am protecting this place. Not to guard against the attack of dragons, but to prevent persecution from humans."

Seeing the principal reply in a sardonic tone, I breathed a sigh of relief.

"I was so shocked to hear you're a dragon... But now, I think I can conclude you're standing on our side, right?"

"I wouldn't save you unless I was standing on your side, right? Anyway, are you satisfied with this explanation? If you're satisfied, I'm going ask you to obey my orders next and clean up the mess you've brought in, okay?"

Arms crossed before her chest, the principal glared at me and spoke.

"...Yeah, I'll make up for my own mistakes. But can I ask a final question?"

"What is it?"

"Principal, what was your predecessor's relationship to you?"

After hearing my question, the principal smiled wryly and answered quietly:

"—My father."

Part 3

"Midgard has been invaded by something suspected to be Yggdrasil. We are already tracking its whereabouts through security camera footage and sent mobilizable personnel to search. Furthermore, there are currently no students whose dragon mark changed color."

After that, we moved over to the command center at the clock tower. The principal concisely informed the people gathered.

Inside the command center were the principal, myself, Lisa, Mitsuki, Tia, as well as the ladies in charge of operating the surveillance system.

Video feeds from various places in Midgard were shown on a large screen.

"Excuse me—Was that really Yggdrasil?"

Having only learned about the situation just now, Mitsuki raised her hand and asked the principal.

After the incident, Mitsuki and Tia had finished preparing lunch and showed up at the classroom. Without being told anything, they were taken to the command center.

Iris, Firill, Ariella and Ren were not at the command center because they had left the classroom to tour the school festival. Since their portable terminals should have received notice already, they were probably going to gather here immediately... But I still felt worried because that "mobile vine" was lurking on campus. Right now, there was nowhere safe in Midgard.

Taking on everyone's worried gaze, the principal replied to Mitsuki:

"I cannot say for sure, but judging from its plant-like appearance, chances are very high. Hence, let's tentatively call the target Yggdrasil."

"If it is Yggdrasil, then from where exactly did it come from... Could it have invaded by mixing among the visitors?"

Mitsuki asked with a frown. The principal threw a glance at me then replied:

"I will send people to investigate the invasion route, which is currently unknown, but the first priority for the time being is the elimination of Yggdrasil. Judging from the fact that it is an extremely small vine, it is unlikely to be the *main body*, but merely a part of it—think of it as a terminal—but we cannot leave it to roam free outside."

It looked like the principal did not intend to disclose my situation.

Sitting next to me, Lisa quietly reassured me:

"Thank goodness, but it is true that you colluded with Yggdrasil and ultimately exposed the students and international visitors to danger. If anyone were to find out, Midgard and the Ds would lose all credibility. Still, there is no other option for her apart from this."

"...Also, if the whole story had to revealed, the principal's position and ability must also be publicized. However, even though no one is condemning me, I will still take responsibility for sure."

Despite agreeing with what Lisa said, I still clenched my right fist firmly.

My left arm was unable, still with no sensation after getting bitten by the principal. I did not know what kind of ability this so-called dominance was or what effect it would have on my body.

However, it was probably necessary to deprive my left arm of its freedom completely.

Thinking back, when Major Loki had subdued me yesterday, my left arm had apparently moved on its own. It was possible that my left arm had been invaded more by Yggdrasil compared to other parts of my body.

"Don't hold yourself completely responsible. I am equally guilty of not reporting despite being in the know."

Lisa placed her hand on my right hand to console me.

"But if anything happens because of this—"

Thanks to the principal, I was able to avoid killing Lisa by my own hand, but there was no telling what further harm might happen in the future.

"Charlotte-sama, I must report to you!"

Mika-san entered the command center frantically and called to the principal.

"—So you have returned. How goest the evacuation of visitors?"

"Evacuation is virtually complete, but two visitors are missing. There were also four students who did not respond..."

"Who are they?"

"The visitors are Mr. and Mrs. Highwalker while the four students are Firill Crest, Ren Miyazawa, Ariella Lu and Iris Freyja of Brynhildr Class."

Hearing this report, we gasped.

Iris and the others... No way—

"Father and Mother are missing? Even Firill-san and the rest...?"

Lisa went pale and murmured.

"Did something happen to Firill and the others?"

Tia asked in worry. Mitsuki's expression turned serious.

"They might have come into contact with Yggdrasil..."

My earlier fears had turned into reality. I instantly stood up.

"I will find them!"

Unable to sit around, doing nothing, I yelled.

"Hold on, wait until there's more information—"

Just as the principal called stop me, one of the communications staff in the command center reported in an acute voice.

"Report received from Commander Shinomiya who has mobilized in search of Yggdrasil. Ariella Lu has been secured. They say they have urgent matters to report. Patching through immediately."

Immediately, the large screen in the command center switched to show Shinomiya-sensei and Ariella.

"Ariella-san! Are you alright!?"

Seeing Ariella's uniform in tatters, Mitsuki asked anxiously.

'I'm alright... But I'm sorry, Ren and the others were captured... I couldn't save them. That thing stole our dark matter then grew big... So don't use fictional armaments to fight—'

Evidently reaching the limit of her physical endurance, Ariella's head fell, losing consciousness.

Holding Ariella's body, Shinomiya-sensei continued:

'Just as she had said, the target seems to be capable of exerting interference on dark matter. I have already issued orders not to manifest fictional armaments recklessly even if the target is discovered... But I have not received acknowledge from everyone yet. If someone tries to fight it, the target might become even more powerful.'

After Shinomiya-sensei finished a low rumbling could be felt underfoot.

"What's that? Did something happen!?"

The principal raised her voice and asked the communications staff.

"Explosion in the dense woodland on the northwest region of Midgard! Showing video!"

On multiple screens, several switched simultaneously to show rising smoke and dust in the woodland area.

Amidst the smoke and dust, a strangely shaped shadow was shaking.

When the wind blew and dissipated the dust cloud, a giant squirming tree came into view. That thing was waving its arms of branches and leaves, moving its thick trunk's legs, it started to "walk."

"Target is heading towards the Academy!"

"Looks it doesn't intend to run."

Hearing the communications staff's report, the principal turned to face me.

"Perhaps it... intends to retrieve you."

Lisa commented quietly.

Knowing the full story, the principal and Lisa seemed to have concluded I was Yggdrasil's target.

Their hunch was likely to be correct. In that case, I should probably hide.

But—

"Principal, I have a suggestion."

I made eye contact with the principal and spoke in a strong tone of voice.

"What? Since people have been captured, we can't take action lightly."

The principal narrowed her eyes and replied.

"That's why I'll go rescue the hostages. If Yggdrasil has the ability to interfere with dark matter, the Counter-Dragon Squad cannot approach it, but I am used to fighting without using fictional armaments."

"...One person going alone is too reckless. Something that large cannot be challenged with close quarters combat."

The principal looked at Yggdrasil shown on the screen while she talked. By comparing it to the surrounding trees, it seemed to be ten to fifteen meters in height. Although smaller than the dragons we had fought previously, the size difference between a flesh-and-blood human was still too great.

"Nii-san, the principal is right. Since fictional armaments cannot be used to fight, defensive weapons can be used to stall it while we rescue everyone—"

"It probably won't work."

However, Lisa interrupted Mitsuki.

"What... Why—"

"I heard that Yggdrasil has the power of electrical interference, so defensive weapons probably won't work. Even the systems here, it is unknown how long they will hold."

As soon as Lisa finished, noise appeared on several screens which then turned dark.

"—Several security cameras seem to have stopped functioning. Please tell me the distance between the interrupted cameras and Yggdrasil! That is very likely to be Yggdrasil's range of interference."

Lisa issued orders. The communications staff replied "Y-Yes!" and hastily operated their panels.

"Roughly fifty meters!"

"Quite a narrow range compared to previous data on Yggdrasil... Perhaps it is not at full power yet. Also, it is possible... that its range of electrical interference is the same range as its ability to interfere with dark matter."

After listening to the communications staff's report, Lisa concluded with her arms crossed.

"What do you mean by that?"

Mitsuki frowned and asked Lisa.

"Human thought essentially consists of electrical currents in the brain. Since dark matter changes in response to human thoughts, if you reproduce thoughts and intentions in the form of electrical currents, perhaps it might be possible to hack dark matter."

"In other words... The powers to interfere with machines and dark matter might stem from the same ability."

After hearing Lisa's idea, Mitsuki brought her hand to the side of her mouth.

"I will be able to cover Mononobe Yuu if I can come within fifty meters of the target. Hence, I will go with him."

"Huh—Lisa, you're not going to stop me?"

I was surprised by her decision because I thought she would object to me approaching Yggdrasil since she knew the whole story.

Seeing my reaction, Lisa showed a wry smile.

"...I won't stop you. Because even if I tried, you'll still go, right?"

Rather than resignation, I could sense very warm feelings from her voice and expression, giving me a mysterious sense of reassurance.

"Yeah, I"m going of course. You know me so well."

Hence, I could answer in composure without feeling anxious.

"That goes without saying. Although it is only for today, do know that I am your girlfriend."

Lisa smiled proudly and puffed out her magnificent chest.

"Tia will go too! Because Tia is Yuu's future wife!"

Tia raised her hand energetically then ran towards us.

"Good grief—even if you go, coordination with the rest of the Counter-Dragon Squad will not be possible if it is only the few of you. I will head over to take command at the scene!"

Saying that, Mitsuki got up from her seat. But just as we were about to exit the room, the principal looked at us sharply.

"Stop."

"Principal, please, let us go."

My left arm was currently under her control. Worried that she might use that power to stop me by force, I bowed my head and pleaded with her.

"Will you succeed?"

However, the principal simply asked a brief question.

"I'll succeed, definitely."

"—Really? Very well, I will believe you, because we can't become friends without trust."

Smiling, the principal saw us off.

Prior to this, I felt worried about my immobile left arm, but now that I knew the principal was supporting us, the immobile left arm gave me a sense of reassurance instead.

Part 4

With a low rumbling in the ground and the blunt noise of trees breaking—

On the other side of a tall fence, a giant tree monster be seen parting the vast forest, heading in our direction.

Yggdrasil's restless branches and leaves could be seen clearly even from the spacious sports ground where we were.

"The operation will start soon. Since dark matter interference is highly probable, the Counter-Dragon Squad must not approach Yggdrasil. Consequently, Nii-san, who is able to fight without using fictional armaments, will get close to the target. Meanwhile, we will provide support to Nii-san while maintaining sufficient distance, using the sports ground's approximate length of 100 meters as a standard of comparison."

Leading the girls of the Counter-Dragon Squad, Mitsuki repeated the decided plan.

"Lisa-san and Tia-san will provide precise cover fire in front of us while staying on guard to make sure their dark matter is not under interference."

"Understood!"

"Tia will do her best!"

Lisa and Tia replied vigorously in response to Mitsuki's orders.

"Nii-san, wait until Yggdrasil steps into the wide-open sports ground before taking action."

"—Roger that."

I focused my mind while nodding to answer.

"Top priority is to rescue the captives first. To avoid harming them, we will not attack easily and focus on supporting and defending Nii-san. When you need attack support, please fire paintballs at the target and we will aim for the painted positions. Lisa-san, the most adept at long-distance marksmanship, will carry out sniping."

"Okay, I'm marking targets with this, right?"

I indicated to the paintball gun in my right hand.

This was my only equipment.

It would be very difficult to destroy Yggdrasil's vines and roots using bullets. An anti-materiel rifle might work but that type of gun would be heavy and bulky, unsuitable for firing on the move.

Hence, it would be more efficient to leave all the attacking to Lisa.

"Right, but before attacking, please confirm the hostages' location."

"Got it, then it's almost time."

After flattening the trees in a dense forest while using its thick roots as legs and trampling the high fence surrounding the sports ground, Yggdrasil showed up.

Due to search teams using fictional armaments to fight before receiving news from Ariella, Yggdrasil had already grown to roughly the height of a three-story school building.

Carrying on a paintball gun, I yelled to the group:

"I'll charge head on, so please cover me."

"Understood, we will open a path for you."

At Mitsuki's orders, everyone raised their fictional armaments.

Lisa had deduced Yggdrasil's interference range to be roughly 50 meters. Since Mitsuki and the others were keeping a distance of 100 meters away from Yggdrasil, there were currently no signs of their dark matter getting hacked.

"Good luck, Yuu!"

"Our classmates and my parents... I am counting on you."

"—Leave it to me."

I nodded in response to Tia and Lisa then stepped fiercely to run.

"Deploy barrier of air pressure! Secure Nii-san's route of advance!"

Strong wind blew from behind accompanied by Mitsuki's voice.

Riding on that gust of favorable wind, I accelerated all at once.

—Neun, Code Sechs discovered. Initiate retrieval.

I heard Yggdrasil's voice faintly in my mind. But perhaps thanks to the principal, that voice sounded very distant. My body also showed no signs of being controlled.

Then with a strange sound of

However, I continued to run without slowing down or changing direction.

I had faith in everyone's assistance and dashed straight for Yggdrasil.

The extending vines, trying to capture me, were deflected by the wall of air created by Mitsuki's group.

Closing in. Within the blink of an eye, Yggdrasil's figure had grown large in my field of view.

—Where were Iris and the others?

While running, I looked for the captives. Since it was impossible to confirm using cameras from afar, the only choice was to get near and find them.

"Found them!"

At a few dozen meters away from Yggdrasil, I located Iris and the others, caught in the branches.

The branches, spreading like wings, were covered in flourishing green leaves. Due to these leaves blocking the view, it was impossible to discover the hostages from a distance.

"Mononobe!"

Ensnared by branches, Iris noticed me and called my name.

"...Mononobe-kun!"

"Mm!"

Near Iris, the captured Firill and Ren also looked towards me.

"You are—"

Mr. and Mrs. Highwalker could be seen slightly farther away. All of them were conscious and looked unharmed.

Yggdrasil was probably planning something so it did not kill them. Dead people had no value as hostages. I knew clearly that Yggdrasil possessed that level of intellect.

It was dangerous precisely because of that.

Through superb martial arts, Ariella was able to escape from Yggdrasil without relying on dark matter... But she was injured to the point of losing consciousness. If deemed necessary, Yggdrasil would surely go as far as to harm the hostages.

—Demand, surrender. Consider presence of hostages.

I heard Yggdrasil's voice in my head.

But I ignored it and ran on the ground.

I did not know if pretending not to hear would work. Although I hoped that my thoughts would be read since I was under the principal's control, but there was no way to confirm that.

But no matter what, I must not respond to its negotiations.

If it knew that hostages were effective against me, it might very well kill one person to establish a strong position, then force me to negotiate terms and conditions.

However, if it knew that negotiating with me was impossible, then Yggdrasil might decide to restrain Mitsuki's group by not using up the hostages lightly—At least, that was what I hoped.

—Neun, no response. Will secure by force.

Seeing me not stopping, Yggdrasil extended towards me a foot of roots used for supporting itself. Judging from what it had said, Yggdrasil seemed to have decided I was not listening to its voice.

The vine tentacles screamed before the impregnable barrier of wind.

Yggdrasil used brute force to tear through the wall of air, thus causing turbulence in the air flow. Mitsuki and the others' wind guarding me dissipated.

However, I had already reached roughly ten meters away from Yggdrasil. The assistance from Mitsuki's group was enough.

Next, what I needed to break through was offense, not defense.

Aiming at Yggdrasil's root that was approaching me, I shot a paintball.

As soon as the red paint stuck to the tree root, a flash of blinding light shot at the marked spot.

It was Lisa's cover fire.

Perfect in both aim and speed, Lisa was impressive as ever. A smile surfaced on my lips.

Passing though the opening exposed by the destroyed root, I continued to advance.

Using that attack just now, I had already gotten a grasp on Lisa's reaction speed.

Next, all I needed to do to open a path was to calculate the time delay for cover fire to arrive!

A wave of roots attacked.

I shot paintballs while charging head on.

No need to dodge. Before the roots touched me, they were going to be erased by Lisa's cover fire.

The yellow light would sometimes brush past me.

Any slight deviation in aim and I would undoubtedly die instantly if I were hit. But I did not feel any fear. Since it was Lisa, I could entrust my back to her without worry.

I picked targets while Lisa shot.

It was as though we were fighting as one person.

Concentration caused my thoughts to accelerate, slowing down the perception of time.

As though guided by Lisa's light, I kept moving forward nonstop.

Perhaps because the enemy was a dragon, the homicidal "Fafnir" did not wake up.

But even so, I still brought out all my power as "Mononobe Yuu," while staring at the enemy.

The base portion where countless tentacles were sprouting was pierced by a blinding flash of light. I jumped on a root using that opening.

I had arrived directly at the bottom of Yggdrasil.

But Iris and the other captives were in the branches high above. Their bodies were entangled by multiple branches, which meant they could not be freed except by destroying the base portion of the branches.

"Lisa, I'm counting on you!!"

I yelled while aiming at the base of the branches, firing two paintballs.

The red paint immediately adhered to Yggdrasil.

The branches ensnaring Iris and the girls were some distance away from those imprisoning Mr. and Mrs. Highwalker, so I had to mark two positions.

"Understood—Pierce, flare!"

I heard Lisa's answer faintly.

Immediately, two consecutive flashes of dazzling light pierced the marked positions. The shots were again precise as ever.

Severed at the base, the branches imprisoning the captives immediately tilted.

"Kyahhhhhhhhh!"

"Waaah!?"

Iris and the other fell down together with the branches, screaming.

"Leave it to Tia!"

However, I definitely heard Tia's voice far away.

"Great!"

Putting my faith in her, I entrusted the fates of Iris and the others to her.

I felt a gust of strong wind blow from behind me, gently catching Iris and the others just before they struck the ground. Tia had made a cushion of air.

I jumped straight down from Yggdrasil's root and rushed over to their side.

"Mononobe, I still can't move..."

Iris was still entangled in branches, squirming while calling to me for help. Perhaps due to the tattering all over her uniform, the sight of her entangled in vines looked especially salacious.

"Mononobe-kun... I'm tied up too tightly..."

"Mm..."

Firill and Ren were groaning in pain, their clothing disheveled.

But I had no time to be taken aback by their appearances.

"I'll save you now. Don't move."

Dispelling the surging wave of irrelevant thoughts, I forcibly pulled apart the vines and branches entangling their bodies.

This allowed the girls to regain their freedom somewhat. Freeing themselves of twigs and vines, they stood up.

During this time, Yggdrasil was still extending countless vines towards us but Tia and the others managed to delay them.

Still, several thick roots were gradually approaching. We were running out of time.

After rescuing Mr. and Mrs. Highwalker after much effort, I shouted at Iris and the girls.

"Take them and leave quickly! Once you get back to Lisa and the others, your dark matter won't get interfered!"

"G-Got it! But Mononobe, what on earth is this?"

Despite nodding, Iris still pointed to the gigantic writhing tree monster and asked. She probably did not know the situation because they were caught before getting the announcement.

"—It's Yggdrasil. You're right, Iris, that thing is an enemy. It's all my fault that things became like this."

To avoid getting overheard, I whispered to her.

"Eh..."

After hearing what I said, Iris instantly froze her expression.

At this moment, the barrier of wind was finally broken.

I raised my voice and yelled at everyone:

"Hurry and run! I'll hold the rear!"

Carrying his wife, who was too frightened to move, on his back, Mr. Highwalker rushed out with Firill and Ren guarding them.

However, for some reason, Iris did not move from her position at all.

"Iris, you run too! This thing needs to be destroyed in one go from a distance—"

"No, Mononobe. If this is Yggdrasil, then something needs to be done before defeating it."

Iris interrupted me, looked up at Yggdrasil and yelled:

"Yggdrasil, return Mononobe's memories to him!"

But the vines and roots ignored her yelling and approached us.

—Consideration, unnecessary.

I heard Yggdrasil's voice faintly. It seemed to have heard Iris but had no intention of agreeing.

"Guh!"

I pushed Iris away with my body, escaping from that spot in the nick of time.

"Please, as long as it's something in my power, I'm willing to do anything! I'll agree to any condition! So please return Mononobe's memories to him!"

However, Iris refused to retreat and yelled at it again.

The answer it gave was silent violence.

Yggdrasil's vines and roots attacked but before they could touch us, dazzling light annihilated them.

Now that the hostages were freed, there was no need for me to do any spotting. Lisa seemed to be providing cover fire for us. I tossed away the unneeded paintball gun and took Iris' hand instead.

"Iris, it's useless! It's impossible to communicate with Yggdrasil."

I yelled and pulled Iris by the hand.

Back when my hand was strangling Lisa, I had begged it many times to stop but Yggdrasil did not listen at all. By this point, I did not think it was possible to negotiate terms.

"Yeah, I know, then I'll change my wording."

Despite getting dragged away by me, Iris still glared at Yggdrasil.

"If you won't return Mononobe's memories, I'll destroy you. By any means necessary, I will definitely destroy you."

Iris' words conveyed pure anger and true killing intent.

This was not a request but a threat.

However, this was far too reckless.

Perhaps enraged to the point of forgetting herself, she raised her right arm, preparing to generate dark matter.

"No! Don't summon your fictional armament!"

I hastily stopped her.

As though suddenly regaining her senses, Iris stopped constructing her fictional armament.

However, Iris was not the only one to stop.

The vines and roots extending towards us also stopped momentarily.

It was not in reaction to my voice. Yggdrasil had paused slightly earlier than when I called out.

It was the instant when Iris raised her hand.

No matter what Iris said or how she resisted, logically speaking, Yggdrasil with its ability to interfere with dark matter should not have any reason to fear her, but it stopped as though frightened.

"Iris, now!"

Although Yggdrasil's reaction was baffling, we could not miss out on this chance.

I led Iris towards Lisa and the others. This time, Iris ran with me without resisting.

I heard strange noises from behind.

Yggdrasil was probably taking action again.

Nevertheless, I simply ran forward without looking back, because Lisa was up ahead.

Flashes of light from the fictional armament of a spear, Gungnir, flew over Iris and my head, presumably to eliminate the vines and roots extending towards us.

Thus, we successfully reached Lisa and the others without getting caught by Yggdrasil.

Having arrived a step earlier, Firill and Ren had already raised their fictional armaments. Mr. and Mrs. Highwalker were quietly observing the situation from behind the Counter-Dragon Squad.

"Please accept my gratitude. It is entirely thanks to you that my parents and our classmates could be rescued successfully."

Lisa thanked me while aiming the spear tip of her fictional armament towards Yggdrasil.

"No, Lisa, it's all thanks to your precision cover fire. Then what's left is just destroying Yggdrasil in one go."

I held Iris' hand and turned to face Yggdrasil.

But when I saw the giant tree's figure with its writhing roots, I instantly felt a chill along my spine.

Somehow, it felt like... it was exuding a different aura from before.

—Threat recognized, self-preservation prioritized.

I heard Yggdrasil's voice in my mind.

It remained a robotic and monotonous voice... However, I could somehow feel a kind of intense emotion from it.

"Nii-san, hurry and borrow dark matter from Iris-san to construct an anti-dragon armament!"

But after hearing Mitsuki's instructions, I cast away all unnecessary thoughts.

Yggdrasil's change was admittedly concerning, but defeating it was top priority right now.

"Got it. But firing from here will cause massive damage to Midgard too, right?"

"Nothing to worry about. We will use the same tactics as in the battle against Hekatonkheir and use wind to blow Yggdrasil into the air. Please destroy Yggdrasil while it is airborne, Nii-san."

Roughly three months ago, Hekatonkheir had suddenly showed up at Midgard and that was the method we had used to destroy it.

Yggdrasil was currently much smaller than Hekatonkheir. Launching it into the air should not be difficult.

"Understood. Iris, we're up."

I called to Iris who was glaring at Yggdrasil.

"...Yeah. If possible, there's so much I still wanna find out about your memories, Mononobe—But it looks like we've got no choice but to defeat it."

Despite showing a gloomy look, Iris whispered and nodded reluctantly.

"Anti-dragon armament—Marduk."

I borrowed dark matter from Iris and gradually constructed a giant turret.

"Special artillery, Megiddo!"

What appeared was a pre-civilization weapon that modern technology could not replicate—Or more precisely, part of it.

The barrel, extending ten-odd meters from its base, had wires and pipes exposed all over the place.

"We will transmute air on a large scale next, everyone, to blow Yggdrasil into the sky! Counting down! Five!"

Seeing my anti-dragon armament's construction completed, Mitsuki gave orders to the Counter-Dragon Squad.

Apart from Iris and me, everyone had their fictional armament raised while staring at Yggdrasil on the sports ground's edge.

"Four, three, two, one—Attack!"

At Mitsuki's orders, the group performed transmutation, converting dark matter into air.

Raging wind blew, sweeping up dust from the sports ground, devouring Yggdrasil's giant body.

On the other side of the dust, Yggdrasil's shaking figure rose into the air.

Blown higher and higher, Yggdrasil broke through the cloud of dust and appeared under the sun.

"Now is the moment, Nii-san!"

"Yes!"

Controlling the anti-dragon armament linked to my mind, I aimed at Yggdrasil in the air.

However—

"!?"

The turret began to creak while shaking intensely. My thoughts could not transmit successfully. The aim deviated.

Was this Yggdrasil's electronic interference!?

Clearly there should be enough distance between us and Yggdrasil, I was shocked.

But my eyes, widened from surprise, had already captured the answer.

Up in the air, Yggdrasil had extended towards here—Small branches.

By extending its branches, it had expanded its range of interference!?

Most likely, it had extended its branches while the dust cloud was blocking our view.

"Guh... Fire!"

Thinking I must shoot before control was completely wrested away, I fired Megiddo.

The shell of blue radiance shot into the air while the barrel melted, unable to withstand the high temperature of firing.

—Strike!

I prayed in my hart.

However, due to being fired before aiming was complete, the shell flew past Yggdrasil's branches, simply scattering clouds high in the sky.

As though pushed by the blast, Yggdrasil descended upon us.

"—Attack!"

Although Mitsuki issued orders anxiously, her raised fictional armament of a bow, Brionac, twisted in shape and transformed back into a ball of dark matter.

This phenomenon spread to the others in a chain reaction.

"My Gungnir!?"

Lisa's fictional armament also lost its shape and flew towards Yggdrasil. Dark matter from Firill, Ren and the Counter-Dragon Squad also flew away from their hands.

While electronically interfering with my anti-dragon armament, Yggdrasil had also hacked the girls' dark matter.

By this stage, we no longer had away means to resist.

"All units retreat! We must pull back from Yggdrasil to create some distance!"

Mitsuki commanded and everyone instantly escaped.

"Iris, we're running away!"

I gripped her hand firmly then broke into a run.

"Y-Yeah!"

Despite nodding and running, Iris still looked at the sky with an expression of intense anger.

The dark matter stolen from Mitsuki and the other girls gradually gathered on the tips of Yggdrasil's extended branches.

Despite running, I still looked up at the sky to watch out for Yggdrasil's movements.

—Eliminate, threat.

Hearing the voice in my head, I shuddered.

I now understood the emotion I sensed from Yggdrasil.

It was killing intent.

"Mononobe! Something's coming!"

Iris suddenly yelled urgently. She had been keeping her eyes on Yggdrasil the whole time.

Then Yggdrasil's killing intent materialized through dark matter.

The hacked dark matter twisted in shape, turning into countless tiny branches, scattering on the ground.

"Everyone hurry and avoid them!"

Although it was too late for me to escape, I still cried out.

I was neither able to dodge completely nor protect everyone.

Someone was definitely going to get hurt or die, that was the type of attack launched.

But just as the branches extended with frightening speed, they suddenly changed trajectories before they could pierce anyone.

"!?"

Iris gasped.

The destination of all the branches was next to me.

They were pointed at the girl who was running, holding hands with me.

Was this killing intent directed towards Iris alone!?

"!!"

Using my right foot as the pivot, I spun my body, switching positions with Iris in a rotation.

That was all I could manage in an instant.

"Ack...!?"

I felt a scorching sensation in my abdomen together with a foreign object, followed by intense pain that rocked my mind. I released Iris' hand.

One of the branches aimed at Iris had pierced my body.

The other branches stopped before touching me.

"Mononobe!"

Iris went pale and steadied my body with her hands.

"Nii-san!?"

"Yuu!?"

I heard Mitsuki and Tia's voices from the distance.

—Neun injured. Emergency. Review response—

I heard Yggdrasil's voice in my mind. The branch in my abdomen was pulled out with massive bleeding. Most likely, Yggdrasil did not intend to harm me in the first place.

The extended branches returned to the falling Yggdrasil, writhing as though in a conundrum.

"Gah..."

I pressed my right hand against my wound but the intense pain and blood loss was making me dizzy. I could not help but fall on my knees.

"Mononobe... You're bleeding, so much bleeding..."

Tears spilled out of Iris' eyes while she made a twisted expression, not knowing what to do.

I endured the pain and said to her:

"Iris—Run! Yggdrasil wants to kill you!"

Yggdrasil was falling towards the ground. Its looming figure was becoming larger and larger in my field of view.

It was was apparently unsettled as a result of harming me. But the attack just now was clearly meant to kill Iris.

If it attacked Iris again, I would be unable to protect her.

".....able. Unforgivable—"

However, Iris might not have heard me. Her eyes, blazing with rage, glared at Yggdrasil above.

I felt a shudder along my spine.

Even the sensation of Yggdrasil's killing intent could not compare to this.

I was stunned by this pure fury, too intense.

"I absolutely won't forgive you!!"

Iris raised her hand, instantly summoning a staff.

It was her fictional armament—Caduceus.

"Don't... The dark matter will get hacked by Yggdrasil—"

I tried to stop her in a hoarse voice but mid-sentence, I noticed a strange change.

Red—

Her fictional armament was supposed to be silver-white.

But now, it was a vivid hue of red.

This dazzling red glow was like the setting sun's.

Not a minor discoloration caused by transmutation on the surface, the staff itself was giving off red radiance.

I recognized that color—That light.

—Code Fünf, manifested. Threat level, updated. Target recognized as successor to Basilisk.

After I heard Yggdrasil's cold and emotionless voice in my head, the countless retracted branches aimed at Iris and descended again.

It was clearly a lethal attack conducted with clear intent to kill.

Too many to dodge, too fast to evade, no matter how one struggled in futility.

However—

"Stay away!"

Accompanied by Iris' voice, the staff released a flash of red light.

Since it was blindingly bright, I reflexively closed my eyes. When I opened them again, the branches approaching Iris had all turned into dust.

The severed ends of the branches were hardened and showed cracks.

Indeed, this was the fast forwarding ability of the Basilisk... "Catastrophe."

Just as I had inherited Leviathan and Hraesvelgr's abilities, it was predictable that someone would inherit "Catastrophe." As for that someone being Iris, I found it surprising but definitely not unexpected.

However... It was strange.

We should be within range of Yggdrasil's interference.

Suppose Iris was transmuting dark matter to recreate Basilisk's ability, then Yggdrasil should be able to interfere with the process.

However, Iris' red staff was glowing continuously.

Was it possible that Iris was producing that red light without using dark matter?

With feelings of disbelief, I looked up at Iris.

She was simply glaring at Yggdrasil with eyes of anger.

She was angry—for my sake.

She was probably not even aware that she was using Basilisk's power.

"I absolutely won't—forgive you!!"

Iris yelled emotionally, swinging her magic staff of red.

The dazzling light turned the world into the color of sunset.

A crimson beam devoured Yggdrasil's gigantic descending body

Chapter 4

The time-stealing light was weathering Yggdrasil gradually.

—Sustained existence, impossible, abandon terminal—

I heard Yggdrasil's voice faintly, then the voice grew more and more distant.

Even a dragon outside of common sense, as long as it was a living organism, there was no way to oppose the passage of time.

Once the end of time was reached, only death's equality awaited.

When the light vanished and my view returned to normal, nothing was left of Yggdrasil's form.

Hardened, shattered, turned into tiny fragments, the remains of the giant tree were scattered across the ground.

"Huff... Huff... Huff..."

Iris' shoulders heaved up and down while she panted, staring at the sky where Yggdrasil had vanished.

The red staff in her hand had disappeared. Exhausted, she sat down on the ground.

However, she immediately turned towards me and extended a trembling hand.

"Mononobe... Don't worry, we'll save you soon."

While I applied pressure to my wound, Iris comforted me gently and stroked my cheek.

"Iris—"

My consciousness had gone hazy from the bleeding and the sharp pain. I called her name.

I actually had a ton of questions for her but I no longer had the strength to speak.

"Nii-san!"

"Yuu!"

"Mononobe-kun!"

Hearing everyone's calling voices and the approaching footsteps, I closed my eyes.

"Mononobe Yuu! Pull yourself together!"

The last thing I heard was Lisa's especially anxious voice.

Part 5

"Hey Jeane-chan, do you want to hear about something interesting?"

This was a hotel near Frankfurt Airport in Germany.

Inside one of the hotel rooms, originally watching television while lying on the bed, Kili Surtr Muspelheim spoke to Jeanne Hortensia who had just exited the bathroom.

"No need, because what you find interesting are mostly things that displease me."

Drying her wet hair with a towel, Jeanne replied.

"Really? It's about Yuu."

"What? Did something happen to the Captain!?"

Hearing Kili's remark, Jeanne changed expressions in alarm.

"Oh dear, you want to listen now? Very well, I'll tell you, actually... According to the news just now, Yggdrasil appeared at Midgard."

Kili spoke with a smile.

"What—Yggdrasil? How is the Captain!?"

"Who knows? The news report wasn't that detailed. However, Yggdrasil was apparently defeated rapidly, so things are probably fine? Seriously... You instantly become adorable whenever Yuu is mentioned."

"...S-Shut up!"

Jeanne went red in embarrassment and covered her face with her towel.

Seeing her like that, Kili laughed in delight

"Furthermore, there's something else amusing. Jeanne-chan, look at the television, the news hasn't ended yet."

Kili urged Jeanne while using the remote to increase the television's volume.

"This is—"

Turning her gaze to the television, Jeanne was rendered speechless by surprise.

'A giant tree has suddenly appeared on Mount Fuji in Japan. This is accompanied by unidentified electrical interference within a ten-odd kilometer radius—'

Shown on the television screen was a giant tree whose scale could not be determined at a glance. It was even taller than Mount Fuji shown on the screen. The treetop was hidden out of sight in the clouds.

"Something like this appeared in Japan...?"

"Yes, indeed. Jeanne-chan, do you remember where Hekatonkheir, which had vanished together with Yggdrasil, first appeared?"

Kili asked with a smile.

"I remember reading it at the base—Its first confirmed location was apparently Japan..."

"Correct answer. What an interesting coincidence. In my view... That gigantic tree is probably Yggdrasil's main body."

Saying that, Kili pointed her finger at the television screen.

"How do you know that?"

"—Because I know more than you, so I understand things you have no idea about."

After dodging Jeanne's question with an vague answer, Kili narrowed her eyes.

"Jeanne-chan, our next destination is Japan."

"Japan..."

Staring at the television, Jeanne murmured.

"Indeed, where Vritra first showed up, it is also somewhere special to me and Yuu. Also among the information on Hreidmar we found at the NIFL base, there were records that he had passed through this country. *Something* will surely happen to this country in the future."

Kili answered with a stiff expression then used the remote to shut off the television. Longingly, she whispered softly and continued:

"I must be present there, in order to become—an existence worthy of him."

Epilogue

"Oh, you're awake."

I opened my eyes and instantly saw Principal Charlotte's face. I shifted my gaze to confirm the situation while tracing back my memories to before I had lost consciousness.

"Is this a sickroom?"

Seeing the white interior of the room with a electrocardiogram device and other intricate instruments of unknown purpose, I asked the principal.

"Rather than a sickroom, this would be more accurately described as an intensive care unit. That being said, no need to worry, your wounds are almost healed already."

"Huh... How can that be possible—"

I remembered Yggdrasil's branch puncturing my abdomen. It should have been pain and blood loss that caused me to faint. Such serious injuries could not possibly have healed so quickly.

But I did not feel pain even when I touched the wound with my right hand. Feeling incredulous, I sat up and pulled up my hospital gown to check the wound.

However, all that remained there was a large scab.

"How long did I sleep for?"

Wondering if I had slept for several weeks, I panicked.

"Roughly three hours."

But the answer was far shorter than I thought.

"What... Three hours?"

"Yes. Although Yggdrasil's terminal was successfully defeated thanks to your efforts, Haruka and the others are still buried in work handling the aftermath and explaining to to visitors, etc. Iris Freyja also caused a commotion by using

Basilisk's ability, but since there are the precedents of Mononobe Mitsuki and you, that did not cause too many problems."

The principal explained the situation indifferently. But if only three hours had gone by, my condition did not make sense.

"B-But my wound couldn't have healed up in such short time."

"—Normally, yes. But I've no need to hide my identity from you anymore, so I used the power of dominance to accelerate your healing."

"So even something like that is possible for your power, Principal..."

I remarked, impressed.

"My dominance is established by injecting my bodily fluids into the target then synchronizing our minds and physiological functions. Just by licking the wound, wetting it with saliva, my healing powers, almost akin to immortality, will remain in your body temporarily."

"Saliva... Then back when you bit my left arm to stop me—"

"Yes, that was injecting saliva through the wound. By the way, aren't you surprised by what I said about immortality?"

Finding it incredible, the principal cocked her head questioningly.

This especially childish action felt extremely cute.

"No... Since I heard you say your predecessor was the original vampire, I sort of expected it."

One tended to associate vampires with inhuman monsters with a preference for fresh blood from virgin maidens. Despite weaknesses such as sunlight, crosses or garlic, they were essentially immortal beings. Hence, I was unexpectedly able to accept the notion when she called herself immortal.

"Jeez, I said that vampire legends have a lot of embellishments, right? I'd feel troubled if you mix up the 'Gray' Vampire with conventional vampires. To put it bluntly, they're actually completely different."

The principal glared at me angrily.

"But you don't like sunlight, right? The principal's office is always dark with the curtains shut tightly..."

"That's because my body's adaptability and recovery powers are too outstanding. I get tanned as soon as I step outside but my skin color recovers the next day. It's because that'd look too unnatural, so I take care to avoid sunlight."

"So there's that kind of reason..."

An immortal body was quite troublesome too. I learned of an unexpected hardship suffered by the principal.

"Eh—But if you're immortal, Principal, why did your predecessor..."

I blurted it out when the thought suddenly occurred to me. Immediately, I noticed a sad expression on the principal's face.

"Oh... Sorry, I shouldn't ask about private matters."

"—Don't worry, I'll tell you eventually when there's a chance, but right now, there are more important matters."

The principal shook her head and spoke seriously.

"Important... matters?"

"A giant tree, ostensibly Yggdrasil, has appeared in Japan."

"What—"

The Yggdrasil that we had defeated was merely the enlargement of a small terminal. I did not think Yggdrasil would have been destroyed even if we had defeated that thing.

But for it to suddenly show up at Japan, I totally did not expect that.

"After that, its interference power on you has been increasing. At this rate, it might resist my dominance. If possible, we should destroy Yggdrasil immediately, but..."

Halfway through, the principal made a gloomy look.

"What's wrong?"

"—I am currently dominating the part of Yggdrasil that's inside you, thereby suppressing it. And due to dominance, I've come to understand what kind of existence Yggdrasil is."

In a stiff tone of voice, the principal continued:

"Destroying Yggdrasil is impossible, or rather... Destroying it is not an option. Because taking it out requires wiping all plant life off the entire planet."

After the shocking conversation with the principal, I was transferred to an ordinary sickroom.

Although my wound was almost completely healed, it would be too much of a stretch to tell others I had made a full recovery, so I had to stay hospitalized for a few days.

What should I do from now on? Looking out the window from my sickroom, I viewed the dark red sky outside.

But I could not think of an answer no matter what. Time passed by in this manner. The first star twinkled in the sky as night fell.

—Knock knock.

At this moment, knocking was heard at the door.

"Nii-san, you are already able to get out of bed?"

The visitors consisted of Mitsuki leading the members of Brynhildr Class together with Lisa's parents, Mark and Linda Highwalker.

Mr. and Mrs. Highwalker had bandages on their heads and arms, probably treated at this medical building.

Iris, Firill and Ren were similarly captives of Yggdrasil earlier but were not injured as seriously.

However, Ariella, who had single-handedly escaped from Yggdrasil's grasp to bring back information to us, still had her arm in a cast due to fighting quite forcibly at the time.

"Yeah, my injury was lighter than I thought. Although it caused some panic because I lost a lot of blood, no vitals were injured apparently."

I made a random excuse and smiled at Mitsuki.

Perhaps because she could tell from my expression that I was really okay, Mitsuki breathed a sigh of relief.

"I see... That is a relief."

"Thank goodness Yuu didn't die..."

Tia said tearfully. Firill gave her a hug from the side and glared at me.

"Mononobe-kun, I hope you won't make others so worried. I almost cried too."

"You're pushing yourself too hard as usual."

"Mm!"

Ariella and Ren nodded in agreement with Firill.

"Sorry... Everyone."

I apologized. A hand on her hip, Lisa immediately stepped forward.

"No amount of apology would be enough! Do you know how worried I was? You absolutely have no idea!"

Lisa looked at me with eyes red from crying.

I knew she had cried for me.

Seeing Lisa raise her hand, I prepared myself to be hit, but her hand simply pressed lightly on my cheek.

"However... However... Thank you. I am truly grateful to you... for rescuing my father and mother."

Lisa thanked me in a trembling voice. Then Mr. and Mrs. Highwalker walked forward and bowed deeply.

"I offer my heartfelt gratitude for rescuing us."

"Thank you so much."

"N-No, not at all, this is the result of everyone cooperating... I didn't do anything amazing."

I frantically shook my head.

"No, you bravely rushed up to that monster on your own. That was not something an ordinary person could do. To be honest, I originally thought that Lisa chose you because there were no other boys, however... It looks like my daughter is an excellent judge of men indeed."

Mr. Highwalker made a wry smile apologetically.

"Huh?"

Hearing his comment, Lisa showed surprise on her face.

"May I ask for your name again?"

Mr. Highwalker looked into my eyes and asked.

"Yes—My name is Mononobe Yuu."

"Thank you. Please continue to look after Lisa, Mr. Yuu. Perhaps I am too impetuous in saying this, young as you are, but if possible, I hope you could seriously consider your future with Lisa."

"Future...?"

Hearing this unexpected word, I was rendered speechless.

"F-Father! What are you saying so suddenly—"

Lisa went red in the face and looked completely at a loss what to do.

"I will pray from afar, hoping for Lisa to find a good partner for life."

Mr. Highwalker patted Lisa on the shoulder then turned his gaze to his wife.

"It's almost time. Let us depart."

"Yes."

"Oh, w-wait!"

Seeing her parents were about to leave, Lisa chased frantically after them.

After they left the sickroom, it suddenly became quiet.

"—N-Nii-san, what shall we do now!? Lisa's father now approves of you as her prospective suitor!?"

Mitsuki came to her senses and shrieked shrilly.

"So that's what he really meant just now?"

Unable to keep up with the conversation, I asked in a daze.

"But it feels like her father meant that he'll respect your wishes, Mononobe-kun. Since there's no forcing, I don't think there's a problem."

"Mm."

Ren nodded in agreement with Ariella.

"But... In that case, if Lisa gets serious... And Mononobe-kun doesn't seem like he's against it."

The instant Firill murmured that, the atmosphere in the sickroom got tense.

"Nii-san, pretending to be a couple was purely an act, right?"

Mitsuki asked to confirm.

"Yuu! If you're getting married, it has to be with Tia!"

Tia bounced up and down and insisted.

"E-Everyone calm down."

At this rate, Iris was going to get the wrong idea. I looked at her, who was standing behind the group.

"...!"

Speaking of which, Iris had remained silent since a while ago. Fear could be seen faintly in her eyes.

"Umm... Mononobe, I-I..."

Iris walked up in trepidation, speaking to me in a trembling voice.

"Iris...?"

Not sure what was up with her, I called her name.

"I'm so sorry... Mononobe."

"Huh?"

Seeing Iris bow her head deeply to apologize, I could not help but sound confused.

The others also looked at one another in puzzlement.

In these circumstances, Iris had come up next to my sickbed to apologize repeatedly to me.

"Because of me, you got injured so heavily, sorry... Sorry, it must hurt a lot..."

Iris had probably been looking for the chance to apologize since a while ago.

I had gotten injured due to protecting her, which she surely felt guilty about.

But fearing my reaction, she dared not speak to me until now. Anyone would fear getting scolded or resented in this kind of situation.

Just by thinking in her shoes, I could understand Iris' current feelings.

I regretted deeply that I had failed to notice her state immediately.

"No, Iris, you did nothing wrong. You don't have to blame yourself so much."

The whole incident happened because I was exploited by Yggdrasil, so Iris had no need to apologize at all.

"But... But..."

"And you saved me, Iris, so—Thank you, Iris."

Just as Lisa did to me earlier, I placed my hand on Iris' cheek and thanked her.

"Mononobe..."

Iris held my hand firmly then showed a tiny smile as though finally relieved.

Seeing her expression, I recalled—

Destroying Yggdrasil is impossible, or rather... Destroying it is not an option—I recalled what happened after the principal said these words.

I had reported to the principal that Iris had produced the red light without generating dark matter.

The answer I got was—Impossible.

That went without saying.

The principal initially said that the fact that Iris had used Basilisk's power was not too big a deal.

That was due to the precedents of Mitsuki and me.

We were able to use dark matter to replicate the powers of past dragons—antimatter and antigravitational matter.

However, what Iris did was on a completely different dimension.

Using Basilisk's power without going through dark matter, it meant Iris had acquired the power of directly creating that red light itself.

That was unprecedented.

It would be more natural to think that I had made a mistake in what I saw, or it was a misunderstanding.

I was sure that the principal probably felt the same.

After a long silence, the principal finally spoke. "Suppose what you say is true"—That was how she began before suggesting a certain possibility.

Those were truly unbelievable words.

"What's wrong? Mononobe?"

While I was lost in deep thought, Iris stared at me in surprise, asking with her head tilted in puzzlement.

"No, nothing."

Despite answering that way, I heard the principal's words repeat in my mind—

What she had told me was—

—Iris Freyja *might turn into a dragon*.

学園長は、俺にこう言った。
イリス・フレイアは、ドラゴンになった可能性がある――と。

Afterword

This is Tsukasa. By the time I realized, it's already been a year since Volume 1 was released, and now Volume 5 is being sold too.

One year... Time sure flies but at the same time, it feels like a long time ago.

Reading the manga adaptation of *Unlimited Fafnir* currently serialized in *Good! Afternoon* magazine, I frequently get a nostalgic feeling somehow.

It feels like the kind of "Wow, so that happened" when reminiscing.

The world of Fafnir as drawn by Saburouta-sensei is truly excellent. It feels refreshing on every read.

I'm so elated to see the story I wrote, drawn in a different expressive manner. Every time I'm about to turn the page, the excitement makes my heart pound like crazy.

Whenever I see Korie Riko-sensei's character art or illustrations, I also feel the same kind of excitement.

Thanks to you, Sensei, for drawing Mitsuki and the girls in kimonos, as well as Lisa's sexy and bold appearance, thus presenting a completely different side to Brynhildr Class. I am truly grateful to you!

Also thanks to everyone's support, I now have the chance to see a brand-new *Unlimited Fafnir*.

Just as announced on the book band, we've decided to animate this series!

I'll be able to see Yuu, Iris and the others move!

To be honest, I still can't believe it. Because when I first heard it might get animated, my feelings were stuck in this state of disbelief, so I never grasped the right moment to rejoice.

But now that the news is released, it's time for me to be happy.

After writing this afterword, I'm gonna cheer loudly while keeping things quiet enough not to disturb the neighbors.

Afterword

Although I'll probably become very busy next, I'll treasure this chance that was given by everyone's support, and work hard writing the rest of the story.

Then let me offer some acknowledgements.

By the way, I think I've been saying thanks since the start, but I still need to thank from the beginning again.

Korie Riko-sensei, thank you for your lovely illustrations again! I think credit goes to the charming characters you drew for giving this series the chance to get manga and anime adaptations.

Please continue to look after me!

Editor in charge, Shouji-sama, thank you for always giving me accurate and rapid advice.

Also, when you told me that the series might get animated, I'm sorry for not giving much of a reaction. But I was extremely overjoyed and elated inside, I'm telling the truth.

I'll be very happy if I could continue along this journey together with you.

Then for all the readers who lend me their support, I'd like to offer my sincere thanks again.

Well then, see you next time.

Tsukasa, May 2014

Illustrator’s Afterword

Thank you for reading *Unlimited Fafnir* Volume 5!

I really want Lisa-san to lend me her lap as a pillow... It seems so soft...

Korie Riko

あとがき

銃皇無尽の
ファフニール5巻を
読んで下さって
ありがとうございます!

リーザさんにひざ枕して
もらいたいです…
やわらかそう……♥

柚木リコレ